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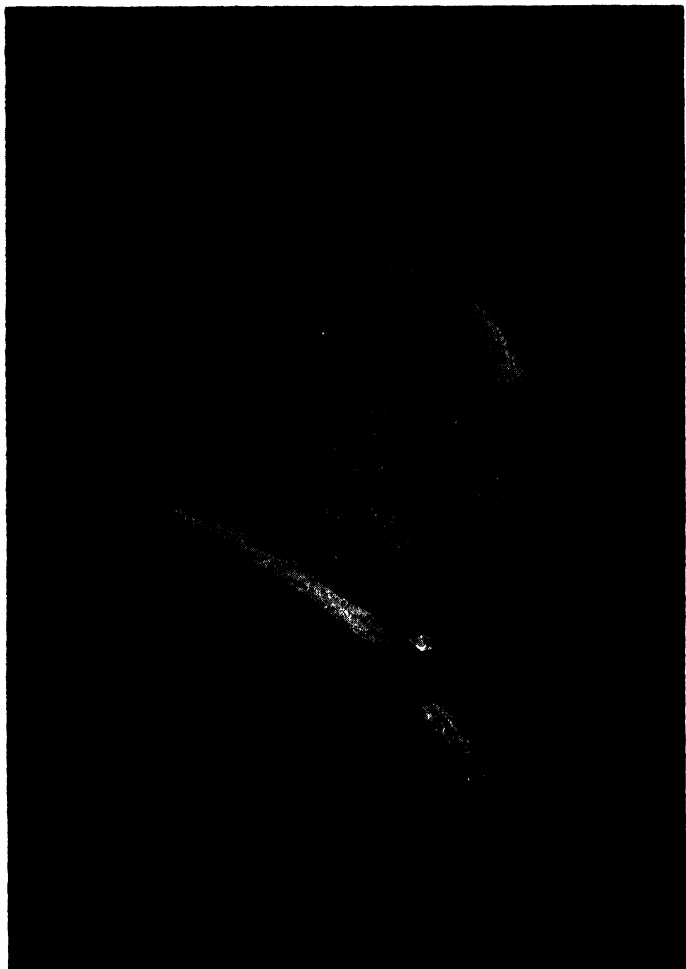


ODYSSEY SERIES IN LITERATURE

ROBERT SHAFER, *General Editor*

ROBERT BROWNING

PIPPA PASSES, AND SHORTER POEMS



ROBERT BROWNING, 1865

*From the portrait by G. F. Watts  
(The National Portrait Gallery, London)*

BROWNING

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PIPPA PASSES

AND

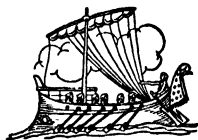
SHORTER POEMS

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## PREFACE

No poet profits so much from selection as Browning, not even Wordsworth. For in Wordsworth's poetry the good and bad are inextricably mixed; Browning's best and worst are pretty well separated, so that his finest poetry can be read without the bad taste left in the mouth by blunders. He has written whole poems without a flaw. And even in the longer works (which can fall so low that in one of them he himself writes, "You see how poetry turns prose") the valuable passages may stand alone. Examples of this are the description of the Fall of Athens that begins *Aristophanes' Apology*, or the much-loved prologues and epilogues to books that deservedly remain unread.

And Browning's poems require a great deal of annotation. Ruskin pointed out, "The worst of it is that this kind of ~~concentrated~~ writing needs so much solution before the reader can fairly get the good of it, that people's patience fails them, and they give the thing up as insoluble." Elizabeth Barrett in the course of their love letters called Browning's attention to the need of explanation for his poetry. His poems make less demand on the understanding than those of most great poets, as far as profundity of thought is concerned; but they have a special difficulty of their own: they are full of recondite bits of erudition and references to obscure historical figures that few educated people know, allusions essential to the meaning of the poems. He had educated himself in his father's library of some 6000 volumes; among other things Browning found here was the *Biographie Universelle* (1822) whose entire fifty volumes he read through. There are also in his poetry many complicated statements that can be cleared up quickly by a brief explanation, though it has not seemed to me desirable in this edition to discuss various interpretations for their own

sake. Our purpose is to be as useful as possible in bringing Browning's poetry home to the college student and the general reader, quickly and efficiently.

I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Curt Zimansky and to Mr. Robert Shafer for their detailed advice concerning the preparation of this book, and to the National Portrait Gallery, London, for permission to use the G. F. Watts portrait of Browning. Anyone who edits Browning owes much to the edition of his works in a dozen volumes, with elaborate notes at the back of each volume by Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke. More recently, William C. DeVane has performed for us a great service in sifting the vast quantities of information that have been piled up concerning Browning, and I wish here to acknowledge my own debt to his synthesis of specific information and biographical detail. It seems to me that it is now possible to combine the best of Browning's poetry with this scholarly material and the critical evaluations, of which Browning's admirers have taken too little account. And this should be applied to individual poems or specific passages in the poetry that are most illustrative, in running commentary where its contribution can be made with the least possible interruption of the reading.

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## NOTE ON THE TEXT

Except for the two sonnets which the poet never collected ("The Names," and "Why I am a Liberal"), the text of the poems in this book, and of those quoted in the Introduction, is that of Browning's own final, revised edition of 1888-1889, published in seventeen volumes by Smith, Elder, and Company. For each of the sonnets mentioned above, the source of the text is given in its first footnote.

I have departed from the text by placing quotation marks only at the beginning and end of a quotation, not repeating them at the beginning of every line.

## INTRODUCTION

### I. THE READING OF BROWNING

Browning is probably the most immediately popular of all our poets except Shakespeare. He is one of the first poets to delight children: When the actor Macready's son was confined to his room with a cough, their friend Browning wrote "The Pied Piper" to provide the boy—addressed as "Willie" at the close of the poem—with a subject for illustration, a purpose it still serves in the nursery. For many a schoolboy, "You Know, We French Stormed Ratisbon" has been a first introduction to French history. A few years later the pupil reading Browning in an "English" course is likely to find his style difficult, but soon discovers that this was a mere external obstacle; and the college sophomore decides that it is easy to pluck out the heart of his mystery. Among undergraduates, Browning enjoys a wide popularity, a popularity that he retains; he is one of the few poets not lost after graduation. The young scholar, just entering upon his profession, is likely again to magnify the difficulties of Browning, as the Browning Societies did a generation ago. As one pursues the study seriously, Browning's philosophy begins to seem so irrational, his learning so pedantic, as to be hardly worth the devotion of scholarship. But the more one reads as a critic, not only as a scholar, the more one is struck by the impossibility of dismissing Browning the poet merely because of his philosophy. The illusion that he is too trivial disappears, like the earlier illusion that he is too hard. One regains respect for the judgment of the college student, that here is something real—though it may be hard to say what.

Many readers have experienced something like the curious variation in their attitude towards the poet that I have just sketched. Furthermore, none of these attitudes is ever completely lost. They all have some validity. This variation explains much of the extreme disagreement found in evalua-

tions of Browning's achievement. Hence, this Introduction will focus attention progressively on various aspects of his work.

## II. MASTER OF MODERN VERSE

One pours your cup—stark strength,  
 Meat for a man; and you eye the pulp  
 Strained, turbid still, from the viscous blood  
 Of the snaky bough: and you grumble "Good!  
 For it swells resolve, breeds hardihood;  
 Dispatch it, then, in a single gulp!"  
 So, down, with a wry face, goes at length  
 The liquor: stuff for strength.

Epilogue to *Pacchiarotto*, 9-16

In "The Statue and the Bust" there are eight lines (121-128) containing a total of 65 words, of which 60 are monosyllables; and for one stretch of more than three lines there occur nothing but monosyllables. Browning is capable of writing lines of the utmost simplicity:

The grey sea and the long black land;  
 And the yellow half-moon large and low.

Boot, saddle, to horse and away!

Oh, to be in England  
 Now that April's there.

Never the time and the place  
 And the loved one all together!<sup>1</sup>

Yet there is no denying that at times Browning is obscure; and sometimes even careful study does not clarify his meaning. His friend Miss Martineau, one of the intellectual women of the Victorian Age, said concerning his *Sordello*, "I was so wholly unable to understand it that I supposed myself ill."<sup>2</sup> It is said

<sup>1</sup> "Meeting at Night," 1-2; "Cavalier Tunes," III, 1; "Home-Thoughts, From Abroad," 1-2; "Never the Time and the Place," 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Martineau, Harriet, *Autobiography*, 4th ed., Boston, 1879, I, 315.

that the journalist Douglas Jerrold was recovering from a severe illness and was finally permitted to read. A friend had sent him some new books and among them was *Sordello*, which happened to be the one that Jerrold decided to begin. As he read he turned pale. He could not understand two consecutive lines of an English poem! "My God! I'm an idiot!" he exclaimed, thinking that, though his health was restored, his mind was gone. Another member of his family began to read the book while he watched her intently, and as he saw signs of growing perplexity Jerrold uttered a sigh of relief, fell back in his bed, and was soon in a deep sleep. Of course the chief trouble was that Browning's *Sordello* appeared in print a century too early. Anyone who has dipped into the books of James Joyce or T. S. Eliot should feel at home with Browning's hardest poetry. These moderns demand the same kind of erudition that it takes to appreciate such phrases of Browning as the title, "Dîs Aliter Visum; or, Le Byron de nos Jours." Perhaps the best proof that Browning can be really difficult is the fact that even his prose is sometimes very obscure. Professor DeVane, who has studied Browning more thoroughly than anyone else, after quoting the poet's prose explanation of the meaning of his very difficult "Numpholeptos" adds dryly, "Browning's explanation is perhaps not so clear as the poem itself." Some passages in Browning's letters to Elizabeth Barrett are so unintelligible that even she mistook their meaning, and had to be informed that he did not mean what she thought. But usually—in the poems in this volume, for example—the obscurity is merely apparent. One may illustrate this by reading the first long speech in prose by Bluphocks in *Pippa Passes*, and then rereading it. The second reading is immensely lighted up because the significance of some of the first remarks becomes clear in the light of later sentences. As G. K. Chesterton very delightfully says, Browning tells things "tail foremost," but the tail is "often the most animated and fantastic" part of the animal.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Robert Browning*, ed. 1925, p. 67.



This is not merely a stylistic peculiarity; it is of the very essence of Browning's poetry, his psychological method. Some passages are obscure on first reading because he has not arranged the thoughts logically, or even chronologically, each step ascending from the level reached by the previous step, each advance prepared for by what goes before. Instead, the phrases are spoken naturally, as they come to mind—as they come to *conscious mind*, for sometimes the phrase betrays an impulse from the stream of subconsciousness where the order of events is very different from what is going on in the clear light of reason. Browning's expression grows out of the same psychological interest with which Freud and other psychoanalysts have since made us familiar. Art has usually imposed on its materials a rational order; Browning came nearer to giving them a natural order than any other poet in a century marked by naturalism. The confusion on first reading springs from the order in which the ideas are expressed, but all are brought in, sooner or later. Consequently a second reading makes a speech surprisingly clear, in a different way from the second reading of poetry by other authors. It is somewhat like the light that suddenly dawns upon us as to the significance of a list of words jotted down in a psychological experiment. In order to achieve compression, Browning throws still another difficulty in the way of the reader: he often omits such words as articles, relative pronouns, and conjunctions. But this, too, is a trick with which one becomes familiar, after noticing a few times exactly what he has done.

To say that obscurity is a defect would be to condemn wholesale most of the leading poets of the twentieth century. And at least this can be said in their defense: that if a poem is worth reading once, it is worth reading twice. Perhaps the very fact that Browning *forces* a second reading accounts for the observable fact that with students beginning the study of literature in college, he is usually more popular than any other poet of the last three hundred years.

◁ The occasional difficulty of Browning's style is only one aspect of its modernity. Arthur Compton-Rickett has pointed out that

Browning informalized poetry as Steele had informalized the prose essay more than a century earlier.<sup>4</sup> The poet, as Browning describes him, might be a periodical essayist or a newspaper columnist:

He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,  
The man who slices lemons into drink,  
The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys  
That volunteer to help him turn its winch.  
He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,  
And fly-leaf ballads on the vender's string,  
And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.  
He took such cognizance of men and things. . . .

"How it Strikes a Contemporary," 23-30

This is the accent of the twentieth century. Indeed, Brockington, in the Preface to his *Browning and the Twentieth Century* says, "to some readers my book may serve as an introduction to modern poetry." Browning is, as another writer says, "the father of modern experimental verse,"<sup>5</sup> and one might add that none of his successors has yet equalled his achievement. Though his contemporaries were Tennyson, Rossetti, Arnold, and Swinburne, he belongs as a poet rather with Masfield, Kipling, Hardy, T. S. Eliot, Frost, and Sandburg. One of the qualities that make Browning so modern is his realism. He speaks of himself as

I who myself contentedly abide  
Awake, nor want the wings of dream,—who tramp  
Earth's common surface, rough, smooth, dry or damp.

"Gerard de Lairese," 111-113.

It is startling to find a religious poem published in 1850 describing in this manner the sect with which Browning felt deepest sympathy:

<sup>4</sup> *Robert Browning: Humanist*, New York, 1925, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Compton-Rickett, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

In came the flock: the fat weary woman,  
 Panting and bewildered, down-clapping  
     Her umbrella with a mighty report,  
 Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,  
     A wreck of whalebones; then, with a snort,  
 Like a startled horse, at the interloper. . . .

"Christmas Eve," 48-53.

This passage also illustrates another very modern characteristic of Browning, his interest in common humanity. He is the first democrat of poetry as Dickens is the first democrat of the novel, but he seems more modern than Dickens just as the psychology laboratory is more modern than the fairy tale.

It would not be correct to conclude from this that Browning's verse is prosaic. He is a great master of versification on the purely technical side, and his poetry makes a sensuous appeal through rhythm, rhyme, and imagery. The melody of his verse is not always heard immediately, but after a certain degree of familiarity one realizes that he is not only an experimenter but a master. The gallop of "As I ride, as I ride"—every line in the poem rhyming with *ride*; the silver-grey tone of "Andrea del Sarto"; the rush and gusto of "Saul"; the effect of classical hexameters in "Artemis Prologizes"; the imitation of the "Toccata" by Galuppi, or of a confident funeral march in "A Grammarian's Funeral"; the insane rhythms of the *Madhouse Cells* ("Johannes Agricola" and "Porphyria's Lover"); the dilettante repose and futility of "Cleon"; the grandeur of the description of the Fall of Athens—these are merely a few of his metrical triumphs, some of them masterpieces whose pure metrical beauty one would not trade for anything by Tennyson.

Browning's style is informal because it is conversational—again the parallel with "Dick Steele" is close. And it is conversational because it is usually spoken as one side of a conversation. It is the style necessary for the special kind of poem that Browning perfected, the dramatic monologue.

as if this were superior in value to the other aspects of his poetry (artistic, psychological, humorous, dramatic, historical, etc.) but to illuminate what he means in famous passages in his best poems that may be misinterpreted standing alone.

In November, 1882, the Reverend Professor B. F. Westcott, D.D. read, before the Cambridge Browning Society, a paper in which he said of the poet,

He has dared to look on the darkest and meanest forms of action and passion, from which we commonly and rightly turn our eyes, and has brought back for us from this universal survey a conviction of hope. He has laid bare what there is in man of sordid, selfish, impure, corrupt, brutish, and he proclaims in spite of every disappointment and every wound, that he still finds a spiritual power in him, answering to a spiritual power without him, which restores assurance as to the destiny of creation.<sup>35</sup>

What Browning *sees*, and photographs for us, might make him a pessimist, but what he *feels* makes him an optimist. And more than any other moralist he preaches utter reliance on feeling. In his first poem, the autobiographical *Pauline* (1833) he wrote that he was "bound to trust all feelings equally," (597-8) and this same attitude was expressed at the end of his life in "A Pillar at Sebzevar" (in *Ferishtah's Fancies*, 1884) where he preaches distrust of the head and trust in the heart. He believed that "Man's soul" receives divine guidance through—not the mind, "Not concept," but through "instinct and impulse"<sup>36</sup>—often through what orthodox Christians have called Original Sin. By using a theological vocabulary, Browning obscured, even to himself, the revolutionary import of his views, which are often in direct opposition to those of the majority of Christian philosophers. Poets under the influence of Freud in the 1930's might have written some of the passages that appeared in Browning's personal confession a century earlier. Browning, like the literary Freudians of the twentieth century, is suspicious of the restraints imposed by reason, by tradition, or by institutions:

<sup>35</sup> *Browning Society's Papers*, I, 397-8.

<sup>36</sup> "Apollo and the Fates," 186-7.

the past is in its grave  
 Tho' its ghost haunts me; still this much is ours  
 To cast away restraint, lest a worse thing  
 Wait for us in the dark.

*Pauline, 39-42*

Browning's feeling convinces him that evils are put on earth with a purpose. They are to train us, since Progress is "man's distinctive mark alone."

Such progress could no more attend his soul  
 Were all it struggles after found at first.

"A Death in the Desert," 86, 89-90

He is speaking here of the soul's progress towards salvation; but the statement summarizes his total estimate of the lot of man. He expresses the hope that this world will not last

One moment longer when Man finds its Past  
 Exceed its Present—

He speaks of

Heart's satisfaction that the Past indeed  
 Is past, gives way before Life's best and last,  
 The all-including Future! \ What were life  
 Did soul stand still therein, forego her strife  
 Through the ambiguous Present to the goal  
 Of some all-reconciling Future? Soul,  
 Nothing has been which shall not bettered be  
 Hereafter,—

"Parleying with Gerard de Lairese,"

168-170; 365-372

And a few lines later he summarizes it all—"Cheer up,—"  
 (1. 408). Yet, curiously enough, this is not joyous; it is not merry, as Chaucer is merry. Browning can be happy while contemplating miseries, for he takes them as a positive sign of coming betterment. In this he is like many revolutionists, whether they are followers of Rousseau or of Marx; though for Browning the hopes are individual, not social. Or we may make another comparison: Where many of the most enjoyable

writers of the eighteenth century showed a tendency to accept life on the assumption that "Whatever is, is right," nineteenth-century writers like Shelley and Browning, recognizing more that was hideous and indefensible, pinned more faith on hope, and said, in effect, "Whatever will be, will be right."

Browning believed that the reality of life is so full of evil and disappointment that it would be unbearable except for aspirations which this life, here and now, can not be expected to satisfy. Speaking for himself he says

we bear, own life a burthen more or less,  
Life thus owned unhappy, is there supplemental happiness  
Possible and probable in life to come? or must we count  
Life a curse and not a blessing, . . .

. . . just that hope, however scant,  
Makes the actual life worth leading; take the hope therein away,  
All we have to do is surely not endure another day.

*La Saisiaz*, 203-6; 242-4

Moreover, the poet was convinced that his philosophy could not withstand a rational analysis. His recourse was bold: he denied the reason any right to judge. Indeed, he makes this his cardinal doctrine. In the mouth of his Pope, "the Christian act" is not something ethical, but mental, a determined belief in what Browning feels to be true.<sup>37</sup> This most optimistic of poets had his own pessimistic suspicions that he was determined to resist. If one looks at the picture he drew of life, without adopting his emotions, one finds it as black and discouraging as the most despairing pessimist could ask for. But Browning succeeded in keeping closed that "only veil betwixt joy and despair."<sup>38</sup> Only once does he lift "the painted veil" and think that perhaps "there was no light behind the curtain."<sup>39</sup> Only

<sup>37</sup> *The Ring and the Book*, "The Pope," 1826 ff.

<sup>38</sup> *Pauline*, 495-6.

<sup>39</sup> Shelley's sonnet, "Lift not the painted veil" should be read in connection with Browning. The second phrase in the sentence above is from the bleakly pessimistic poem, "The City of Dreadful Night," by a follower of Shelley, James Thomson. It may serve to suggest the kind of Late-Victorian pessimism into which many of Browning's contemporaries were falling. We can see what he was fighting against.

once does he express serious doubt, and that is in the Epilogue to his most optimistic volume, *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884), when he suddenly grows cold with terror at the thought that perhaps all his optimistic constructions are an illusion produced by human love:

a chill wind disencharms  
 All the late enchantment! What if all be error—  
 If the halo irised round my head were, love, thine arms?

With that utterance, for once the poet shows us how deeply he has been appalled by what he sees. Ordinarily he gives us only his answer: (that human love, of which we are certain, must be an earnest of Divine Love.)

Thus, writing love poetry was for Browning a form of religious propaganda more immediate than his arguments addressed to the mere intellect. And his theology supplies a sort of cosmic frame to his lyrics of amorous passion. The frame is quite detachable, and readers who do not like the theology find that it can be separated from what delights them in Browning's poetry. In any case, we should understand it as a consistent, integrated, conception of life and destiny.

## VII. SOURCES OF HIS FAITH

—What was all this except the lesson of a life?  
 And—consequent upon the learning how from strife  
 Grew peace—from evil, good—came knowledge that, to get  
 Acquaintance with the way o' the world, we must not fret  
 Nor fume, on altitudes of self-sufficiency,  
 But bid a frank farewell to what—we think—should be,  
 And, with as good a grace, welcome what is—we find.  
*Is—for the hour, observe!*

*Fifine at the Fair, 1878-85*

Browning's theological terminology is sometimes confusing, sometimes revealing. He and his wife were both of Calvinistic origin, brought up in the Dissenting (Non-Conformist) sect of Independents. There are many traces of his Dissenting background in his books. But he is not a Calvinist; in "Caliban upon Setebos" he parodies the doctrines of Election and Repro-

bation as implying a cruel and savage god—better called a devil.<sup>40</sup> Browning's God is "All-Loving," and damns no one. Browning did not believe in Hell, and while he believed ardently in Heaven, he did not consider it a part of a system of rewards and punishments.<sup>41</sup> Like his own Johannes Agricola, Browning believed that nothing could ever avail to keep him from getting to Heaven, in time. He adopted certain fundamental doctrines, such as that of the Incarnation, but he was not a Fundamentalist. On the other hand he was not a "Liberal" or a "Modernist," since he held firmly to any Fundamentalist doctrine that would justify his cosmic optimism. He chose for himself, but when he accepted a doctrine he took it in a literal sense. He objected vigorously to the Liberal theological thinkers of the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> But he is even farther from Catholicism, in spite of his interest in everything else he met in Italy. His sympathetic use of Catholic characters in his fictions simply follows the romantic fashion of Protestants from Scott to the present day. Even the Pope in *The Ring and the Book* is not a Catholic in his beliefs, and the theology he sets forth is Browning's own. The poet's extreme individualism, his scorn for the past, for restraint, for authority, are remote from Catholicism. Moreover, Browning rejects all rationalistic treatment of religion, whether Catholic (Thomist), Calvinist, Modernist, Materialist, Platonic, or Aristotelian. For he relies on emotion—not on a mystical emotion which turns away from human instincts, but on those very natural instincts themselves. He puts trust in something that

dwells in all,  
From life's minute beginnings, up at last  
To man—

*Paracelsus*, V, 680-82

<sup>40</sup> See the notes to that poem, and to "Johannes Agricola" and "Which." Browning's religious position is well presented in his "Christmas Eve," "Easter-Day," and "A Death in the Desert."

<sup>41</sup> This is made clear in "Ixion" and "A Camel-Driver."

<sup>42</sup> See notes to "Christmas Eve," "Epilogue to *Dramatis Personae*," etc. An excellent treatment of the subject will be found in Raymond's "Browning and the Higher Criticism," P.M.L.A., XLIV, June, 1929.



or, as he says through his Pope (speaking of the instinct to preserve life found in "even tree, shrub, plant,")

what I call God  
And fools call Nature.<sup>43</sup>

One of Browning's defenders, Margaret Sherwood, has pointed out that his originality in religious thinking consists in making human instincts share the life of God. "It appears as instinct . . . it is God within."<sup>44</sup> The relation of Browning's thought to romantic naturalism is somewhat concealed by the fact that he has only slight interest in external Nature—scenery, rural life, and physical science. Nature in this sense is probably less important to him than to any other important poet of the nineteenth century. But Nature as it manifests itself in Man—instinct, passion, feeling—this is his guide.

So glorious is our nature, so august  
Man's inborn uninstructed impulses,  
His naked spirit so majestic.

*Paracelsus*, V, 618-20

Browning recognizes in Man the traditional division between natural impulses and the instructed mind, but he relies on instinct, not reason.

Browning did not originate his philosophy. While he is in method, style, and psychology, like a twentieth-century poet, he is in philosophy a belated Romantic. This is because, as Abercrombie points out, his "intellectual life was spent in a backwater."<sup>45</sup> Browning was doubly provincial: As a Dissenter, he could not be admitted to the established universities. And he was the first literary suburban. When he turned from the petty circles of Camberwell and the Non-Conformist chapel,

<sup>43</sup> "The Pope" 1073-4. Cf. 1735-6 and 1766:  
"The hidden forces, blind necessities,  
Named Nature" (and)  
"The forces and necessities grow God—"

<sup>44</sup> "Browning and Mr. Santayana," in *Undercurrents of Influence in English Romantic Poetry*, Cambridge, 1934, p. 335.

<sup>45</sup> In *The Great Victorians*, 83.

both of them out of touch with the great world of thought and action, to find a more stimulating mental life in books, it is not surprising that he would adopt the dominant ideas of the preceding generation. His philosophy could almost be summarized in the remark of Keats, "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination."<sup>46</sup> Of all the Romantics, he felt greatest admiration for Shelley, to whom he doubtless owes his conviction that one can trust in the feeling within oneself and the Love which must sweep through the universe in answer to it. Shelley's radical deduction from this, his trust in Liberty as a panacea, was still Browning's political faith a generation later, when it had become the accepted creed of the middle class.

Browning's political and social views seem to have changed very little. He said in *Pauline*, "I was vowed to liberty."<sup>47</sup> Fifty-two years later he wrote a sonnet "Why I am a Liberal." He was not a Liberal in the present American sense, as the word has come to mean expanding the functions of government. Thus, in his "Apparent Failure" he classifies the socialist with the insane and lustful. As he contemplates three corpses in a "Doric little Morgue" in Paris, he speculates that one of them may have committed suicide because he was

red as blood, a socialist,  
A leveller! Does the Empire grudge  
You've gained what no Republic missed?  
Be quiet, and unclench your fist!

(42-45)

When Browning called himself a "Liberal" he meant that he was a "rugged individualist"; he was using the term in the early Victorian sense to mean belief in an extreme degree of freedom from institutional control. Politically, it meant support of *laissez-faire* economics. For example, "The Englishman in Italy" (1845) concludes with a bitter attack on the Corn Laws, a tariff on agricultural products against which the merchants and manufacturers had been waging a skillful campaign.

<sup>46</sup> Letter to Benjamin Bailey, Nov. 22, 1817.

<sup>47</sup> Line 425.

Browning's sympathies were with his own class, the well-to-do *bourgeoisie* which had taken control of England politically with the Reform Bill of 1832 and was to dominate English life and culture all through his own lifetime.

Browning also carried on into the Victorian age a romantic faith in the future. Long after Matthew Arnold's poetry had given voice to the disillusionment which was to become the dominant mood of English literature, Browning was still finding a bright promise in evil itself. "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Shelley asks, in his "Ode to the West Wind," as Browning's *Paracelsus* sees "a good in evil, and hope in ill-success."<sup>48</sup> Swinburne, expressing the reaction of the late nineteenth century, parodied Browning's philosophy thus:

most things are so wrong  
That all things must be right.<sup>49</sup>

But in Browning the faith of Shelley is strangely transformed. Just as Browning—moving with his class—turned the wild romantic love of liberty into a firm insistence on the freedom of business from governmental control, so he takes Shelley's revolutionary optimism and turns it into a conservative optimism. He adheres to the view that we must not "fret nor fume"—"But bid a frank farewell to what—we think—should be."<sup>50</sup> Unlike Shelley, Browning rejoices that, in the words of *Adonais*, "hopes swarm like worms within our living clay." And no poet was ever so enamoured of "that unrest which men miscall delight"; far from wishing to "outsoar" it, to go where that unrest "can touch him not" again, Browning will give everything for the hope of keeping up this unrest throughout eternity; his last words in print were, "fight on, fare ever There as here!" Shelley, expressing an almost Manichaean contempt for ordinary existence, says

Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,

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<sup>48</sup> *Paracelsus*, V, 875-6.

<sup>49</sup> Lafourcade, George, *La Jeunesse de Swinburne*, Paris, 1928, II, 163.

<sup>50</sup> *Fifine at the Fair*, 81-83.

while Browning in his second letter to Elizabeth declared, "I only make men and women speak—give you truth broken into prismatic hues, and fear the pure white light, even if it is in me." Perhaps the most significant word here is "fear," and it suggests an element in Browning's thought that has been almost ignored by scholars and critics. Browning and Shelley may be similar in metaphysics, but they are utterly different in personality and in tastes.

In addition to his Non-Conformist background, his Romantic literary education, and the views current in the Mid-Victorian middle class, another important factor in the formation of his philosophy was his individual personal experience. Well could he say, towards the end of his life,

Have you found your life distasteful?  
 My life did, and does, smack sweet.  
 Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?  
 Mine I saved and hold complete.  
 Do your joys with age diminish?  
 When mine fail me, I'll complain.

"At the 'Mermaid,'" 73-8

For in the mere conditions of his life, Browning was probably the luckiest poet that ever lived. He was born into a prosperous home, surrounded with music and books (his father's library had 6000 volumes), within walking distance of England's chief public art gallery. His health was remarkably good.<sup>51</sup> He was an only son—and in Victorian England, this meant privileges indeed. He told Elizabeth Barrett that he "never looked for the least or greatest thing" that his parents could give, "but given it was—nor for liberty but it was conceded."<sup>52</sup> His parents did not even insist that he attend college; and though they had paid for him to attend London University, then just being organized,

<sup>51</sup> This caused him to be too optimistic about his wife's health. According to Griffin and Minchin (*Life*, 223), he took "throughout" her illness "a sanguine view of his wife's physical powers; the shock which their failure caused him was consequently overwhelming." No other rebuff to his optimism came home to him so close.

<sup>52</sup> *Letters*, II, 226.

he dropped out after a few weeks. His biographers, speaking of the fact that there was never an important change or development in his attitudes, say, "For this the manner of his education . . . is largely accountable. He was allowed to grow; no effort was put forth to make of him something other than he was by nature."<sup>53</sup>

Nor was he disciplined by experience. His family was so prosperous that he never in his life had to do a day's work for pay. Even when he wished to marry he was not forced to take on greater financial responsibilities, since Elizabeth Barrett had an independent income. He did make one tentative offer to support her, so that she could transfer her "advantages" to her brothers and sisters—whose lives were being ruined by their dependence. He says he had thought of taking steps toward applying to someone like Lord Monteagle for a political appointment, but reconsidered and accepted Elizabeth's view that he ought not put away God's gifts.<sup>54</sup>

Besides ease, health, security, art, books, and popularity, Browning was able to indulge in travel, even to take up residence in Italy or France whenever he wanted to. However, at the end of his life he preferred to be in London for the social season, and became a well-known figure in society. He was awarded honorary degrees by Oxford and Cambridge. Browning's one love affair had ended in complete success—after a year of obstacles enough to please his chivalric or even melodramatic taste. He won his lady, and lived a perfectly happy married life. They had a son who attended the Oxford that had been closed to the poet, and who then became a young man of expensive sporting tastes. Browning lived to see him a successful painter. The poet died in his son's house, the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice, soon after reading a telegram announcing the favorable reception that had just been accorded his last volume of poetry, published the day of his death. He was buried in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. Even during his life he had become the demi-god of a cult devoted

<sup>53</sup> Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, 284.

<sup>54</sup> *Letters*, II, 227–8, 230.

to studying him as a prophet and philosopher, organized by Dr. Furnivall, who had also organized the Chaucer Society and the Shakespeare Society. A poet could not but be gay in such a company!

It must be admitted that few readers of poetry today feel much sympathy with either Browning's complacency or his own kind of religious worry. The well-to-do *bourgeoisie* which found its voice in Macaulay and Browning has ceased to dominate the literary public. The twentieth century has hit this class very hard and shattered its optimism. Meanwhile both Romanticism and Calvinism have declined rapidly in English and American culture. We might have expected Browning to lose his standing among poets. But the contrary has happened. His best poetry is more admired than ever. At the end of the nineteenth century Santayana wrote, "There is serious danger" that we "may take him for a philosopher."<sup>55</sup> We do not fear that danger now. But we still gather "from his pages the unthreshed harvest of reality," as even Santayana, his most deadly critic, had to admit. And perhaps the literary taste of our generation places a higher value on the unthreshed harvest of reality than did the turn of the century. His poetry gives a vivid sense of life, "the mere living." Music, history, love, nationality in drinks, artists known and unknown—such realities are the matter of his poetic vision. We go to him for immediacy rather than profundity. In his one critical essay, on Shelley, he distinguishes between the objective (dramatic) and the subjective poet. The message he preaches as a subjective poet has lost its popularity. What he says of the objective poet remains an excellent reason for reading Browning:

For it is with this world, as starting point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned. The spiritual comprehension may be infinitely subtilized, but the raw material it operates upon must remain. There may be no end of the poets who communicate to us what they see in an object with reference to their own individuality: what it was before they saw it, in refer-

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<sup>55</sup> *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, New York, 1900, p. 194.

ence to the aggregate human mind, will be as desirable to know as ever.

### VIII. POETIC ARTIST AND HUMORIST

I must not think, lest this new impulse die  
In which I trust; I have no confidence:  
So, I will sing on fast as fancies come;  
Rudely, the verse being as the mood it paints.

*Pauline*, 256-9

Browning's great achievements are not those which relate him to Romantic philosophy or to that Victorian complacency against which the great Victorian thinkers were waging war. His special merits are those which anticipate the twentieth-century verse. Hence I have included in this volume a number of poems that express his theory of art and poetry.<sup>56</sup> They are given complete, and do not need to be discussed here. Elsewhere he has a definition of "Art,—which I may style the love of loving"—that is characteristic of Browning. He explains that "Art" is the "rage of . . . feeling the absolute truth of things" and furthermore declares that this view "corroborates the sage," Plato.<sup>57</sup> From the actual writings of Plato one might rather fear that Browning would be the first poet banned from the sage's ideal Republic! If there is any doubt of it, consider the following statement by Ogniben in the second act of *A Soul's Tragedy* which voices an important purpose in Browning and his successors: "I desire to be able, with a quickened eye-sight, to descry beauty in corruption where others see foulness only."

In attempting to evaluate the art of Robert Browning, one begins to suspect that he is a greater poet than any who has written English since his time. As he says in his first poem, he "must not think," but he can sing. He gives us not wise reflection about life, but the direct sensation of life. He can create a vivid sense of many experiences: music, Renaissance

<sup>56</sup> E.g. "Shop," "House," "Memorabilia," "Popularity," "How it Strikes a Contemporary," "Transcendentalism: a Poem in Twelve Books," "Touch him ne'er so lightly," "Prologue" to *Asolando*, "Poetics."

<sup>57</sup> *Fifine at the Fair*, 684-6.

art, the gallop of a horse across the desert, a night-ride, the inner feeling of hatred, of love in a variety of moods, the very world-view of men who lived in antiquity; the color, the oddity, the adventure and splendor of life. In his poetry, as Dixon Scott has said, "All the treasures, fruits, and gems of the world are fingered with a satisfying voluptuousness," and to waste time on his theories is "to spend your time painfully struggling up a maypole instead of catching its ribands and joining the dance."<sup>58</sup> He owed his special merits to his worship of experience.

—Experience, I am glad to master soon or late,  
Here, there and everywhere i' the world, without debate!  
Only, in Venice why? What reason for Mark's Square  
Rather than Timbuctoo?

*Fifine at the Fair*, 1819-22

He confesses in *Pauline* that he finds in himself "a principle of restlessness which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all—" (277-8). Hence he is for us preëminently the poet of youth. Young readers get much from Shakespeare, but there is more that they do not get; the young reader can probably get from Browning almost everything of value he has to offer.

And he can make us live these many experiences because he is a master of the technique of his art. He followed Keats in making his appeal to all the five senses—to taste, smell, and touch, as well as to ear and to the mind's eye. No poet has more wealth of concrete detail, and certainly none ever had such a thoroughly physical imagination. He is a poet of muscle rather than vision. "The distinction between the eye-and-ear type of imagination and the muscle-and-nerve (motor-tactual) type becomes clear if one compares Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar* with Browning's *Prospice*," says Bonnell, discussing "Touch Images in the Poetry of Robert Browning,"<sup>59</sup> and it has also been pointed out that "He sees with pre-Raphaelite distinctness the particular objects which make up what we call nature."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Men of Letters*, pp. 253 and 255.

<sup>59</sup> *P.M.L.A.*, XXXVII (September, 1922), 597.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen, Leslie, "Browning's Casuistry," in *Living Age*, CCXXXVI (January, 1903), 262.



Most astonishing is Browning's range of metrical invention, including certain bold effects that may be considered more or less appropriate: For example, dactylic tetrameter is better suited to a Cavalier Tune than to a meditation on death; though "Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead" sounds too gay, nevertheless Browning wished it to sound gay, whether we think he should or not. We may disagree with the thought, but we cannot deny the effectiveness with which the poet conveys the mood. "Rabbi Ben Ezra's" meter is not meditative; it is doggerel; but doggerel is appropriate dress for such an outburst. If we ask only how well Browning has succeeded in what he wished to do, we would have to say that these two are great poems. And, indeed, they have ranked among his most popular pieces, for many admirers. It would be a psychological problem worthy of the poet's own genius, to study how often Browning's technical skill has charmed readers into accepting his ideas. Browning's success as an artist was mentioned in discussing his mastery of modern verse, but this whole volume of selections would be needed to give a just illustration of his skill.

We have Saintsbury's judgment that "Browning, though an audacious, is almost invariably a correct prosodist."<sup>61</sup> He achieves a subtle music that one may not perceive until after many readings, when at last the almost conversational tones seem to take on form, and a very beautiful, very quiet melody emerges and becomes audible. The only adequate way to appreciate many of the poems is to memorize them. We may still echo Elizabeth Barrett's congratulations. "Speech half-asleep or song half-awake?" You have right of trove to these novel effects of rhythm."<sup>62</sup> His wife deserves some credit for the final beauty of the poetry of his best period when she could suggest revisions. Professor Hatcher, in *The Versification of Robert Browning*, a very thorough survey, says, "It is not without significance that the great lyrics and dramatic monologues were composed or refined under her influence; and that in these

<sup>61</sup> *A History of English Prosody*, III, 216.

<sup>62</sup> *Letters*, I, 253, after mentioning "The Flight of the Duchess." (The first phrase in the quotation is from "The Flower's Name.")

poems, in contrast to those of both his early and later periods, there is dominant a melody and perfectness of poetic diction which Tennyson himself seldom surpasses."<sup>63</sup> Early in their acquaintance Elizabeth Barrett accused him of a habit of being difficult, and even earlier he confessed that he had sought deliberately to write "ugly things."<sup>64</sup> He swore off. But after her death he again slipped into carelessness about form. Indeed, his biographers say that he always shrank from the labor of revision,<sup>65</sup> which is what one would expect in such a rugged individualist and enemy of discipline.

In the diction of poetry he was a pioneer. According to Herbert Read, who mentions him as beginning the modern phase of poetry, his originality in that respect has probably not yet been fully recognized, though "it has been studied to some effect by modern poets"; he made progress in "the direction of flexibility, of making diction follow the subtleties of an unusual imaginative vision."<sup>66</sup> At a period when the fashions of poetry had carried elegance and smoothness as far as they could well go, Browning threw poetry open to harsh and ugly words. This, and his love of monosyllables, gave an Anglo-Saxon flavor to his work, which may be related to the contemporary revival of interest in the Anglo-Saxon element in English, but is certainly due more to his own rugged taste as a sturdy middle-class Briton of the Britons. As Oliver Elton puts it, "Browning seemed to rejoice in the inherent defects of our language; he liked it to be English to a fault."<sup>67</sup> It would be hard to overestimate the value of this for modern poetry.

There is another way in which he broke away from Victorian methods. F. W. Bateson has pointed out<sup>68</sup> that for the most part his contemporaries "sugared the common reader's pill." Usually a Victorian poem has a narrative frame which eliminates "disconcerting plunges into *medias res* which are of the

<sup>63</sup> P. 20.

<sup>64</sup> *Letters*, I, 134 and 98.

<sup>65</sup> *Life*, p. 300.

<sup>66</sup> *Phases of English Poetry*, London, 1928, pp. 136 ff. and 142-3.

<sup>67</sup> *Survey of English Literature*, 1780-1880, III, 391.

<sup>68</sup> *English Poetry and the English Language*, Oxford, 1934, p. 126.

essence of poetry," a frame which brings it "down to the level of prose. The reader knows where he is; it serves the purpose of an introduction and notes." To this charge Browning's best poems can plead not guilty. They certainly plunge into *medias res*, and leave the introductions and notes to the commentator.

To see how important—and successful—Browning is from the point of view of modern poetry, compare his best poems with an equivalent number of the best poems of all the twentieth-century English and American poets put together. Or test him by the manifesto of the Imagists, prefixed in 1915 to *Some Imagist Poems*:

1. To use the language of common speech. . . .
2. To create new rhythms—as the expressions of new moods. . . .
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. . . .
4. To present an image. . . . We . . . believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. . . .
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred or indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is the very essence of poetry.

In every one of these six "rules" Browning can beat most twentieth-century poets at their own game.

Imagery,<sup>60</sup> meter, diction, dramatic concentration—by his mastery of these technical means he achieves his vivid effects. The result is a peculiar poetry at once realistic and romantic.

Ramp, tramp, stamp and compound  
Fancy with fact—the lost secret is found!

"Apollo and the Fates," 214-5

Romantic realism is a common characteristic in Mid-Century English and American literature; but this takes different forms in different authors, ranging from the gargoyle grotesquerie of

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<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth writes to him (*Letters*, I, 414) that he is never misty or vague; rather there is an extra-distinctness in his images and thoughts; but since these sharp lines cross each other infinitely, they sometimes obscure his meaning.

Dickens to the Hellenic moderation of Arnold. It appears in authors as different as Carlyle and Trollope, and extends from Macaulay to Meredith. Browning's romantic realism is not a half-and-half addition, nor a mean between the two, nor an idealist's escape from both. It is rather a complete fusion of both in extreme form. A single poem, a single line, may be at once romantic and realistic. Any character may be studied by Browning in a spirit that might be described as very romantic or very realistic. It could never be called classical. It does not assume a conflict between "flesh" and "soul."

Another characteristic of Mid-Century English literature which Browning shares with all the authors I have just mentioned is humor. His humorous poetry is the most successful that we have had in our language for a hundred years. Indeed, we must go back to Byron to find any comic poet to equal him, and even Byron is more of a wit than a sympathetic humorist. Browning recognized his kinship with Byron: he said he would go a long way "to see a curl of his hair or one of his gloves," though "Heaven knows that I could not get up enthusiasm enough to cross the room if at the other end of it all Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey were condensed into the little China bottle yonder."<sup>70</sup> He is most like Byron in his use of odd rhymes, like *fabric, dab brick*, or *Pascal, task call*,<sup>71</sup> though he got this taste directly from his own father, who also composed humorous verse. His father was very fond of Hogarth and of the Dutch artists, painters much closer to his son's poetry than the Italian artists who so often supplied the subject-matter for that poetry. "Fra Lippo Lippi," for example, is not an Italian primitive but a Rembrandt in verse, with its rich tones, its realism, its humor, its light and shade. Robert Browning Senior liked to draw hasty sketches, and these were almost always grotesques; he "could not draw a pretty face."<sup>72</sup> His son inherited this taste, and extended it to include what he calls his "odd liking for 'vermin'"—snails, efts, lizards, newts,<sup>73</sup>—a

<sup>70</sup> *Letters*, II, 453.

<sup>71</sup> "Grammarians' Funeral," 70-74; "Christmas Eve," 1268-9.

<sup>72</sup> *Life*, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> *Letters*, I, 368.

love that shows itself in such poems as "Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis." He saw a connection between the grotesque and his interest in passionate, energetic souls, and he speaks of

the face, an evidence  
O' the soul at word inside; and, all the more intense,  
So much the more grotesque.<sup>74</sup>

Browning never recognized the intensity that grows out of "the depth, and not the tumult of the soul"—to use a most classical expression by Wordsworth—the kind of intensity that gives a grandeur to beauty; in the words of Coleridge, "an emotion tranquil from its very intensity."<sup>75</sup>

But Browning's humor is not always grotesque. It can be quiet and delicate and no less delightful. After he first met Miss Barrett and forthwith wrote her a passionate love letter, she replied that if he attempted any other reference to the subject she would not see him again. A few months later he let her see in manuscript a poem, "The Lost Mistress," in which a rejected lover much in the position of Browning utters the following stanza. No poetic style could be more simple than this:

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,  
Or only a thought stronger;  
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,  
Or so very little longer!

By the time she read this, his expressions had indeed become a thought stronger—he had written on October thirteenth, "My life is bound up with yours—my own, first and last love."

As an artist Browning is receiving today the recognition that he has waited for a hundred years; but even yet he has not been sufficiently recognized as a humorist. While we no longer value his "message," there has been a tendency to continue the habit of reading him too solemnly; and some of the sentimen-

<sup>74</sup> *Fifine at the Fair*, 1719-21.

<sup>75</sup> *The Friend*, sec. II, essay ii.

tality that has been spent on his love affair has been almost as bad as anything of which the worst Victorians were guilty. Browning's humor, like the music of his verse, is often subtle, and may be missed until one is thoroughly familiar with the poem. But when it is perceived, it is, like the music, quite pervasive, and changes the whole aspect of the poem, which becomes at once not only a thing of beauty but also a thing of comic delight. Browning must be read with somewhat more attention to his humor, even when it is complex. One may go through pages of comment on the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" without finding the least hint that the poet or the reader could find anything to smile at in the poem. After all, it was Browning's delight to *toy* with various problems, and his philosophy was partly just the formulation of an excuse for his pleasure in "making a case" for a sinner. The results are none too consistent; and like most sophistry constructed somewhat in the spirit of play, it was taken seriously in time by the world and by its author. We are wise to get back to the spirit of the game. His humor is many times more effective than his optimism as an antidote to the evils he sees in the world.

## IX. BROWNING THE POET OF HISTORY

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,  
Given up myself so many times,  
Gained me the gains of various men,  
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes.

"Evelyn Hope," 41-4

John Addington Symonds, criticizing Browning's presentation of Aristophanes and Euripides, wrote what we may apply to all of Browning's argumentation: "As a sophist and a rhetorician of poetry, Mr. Browning proves himself unrivalled, and takes rank with the best writers of historical romances."<sup>76</sup> Intended as censure, this includes great praise. The Browningites treated the poet as if he were a moralist and belonged with

<sup>76</sup> *Academy*, VII (April 17, 1875), 389.

Arnold and Newman; whereas he really belongs with Scott and Macaulay. As Scott's novels stand first in historical fiction, Browning's dramatic monologues are the most successful concentrations in all poetry of characteristic moments of the past.<sup>77</sup> No one can be compared with him in power to give us the quintessence of history in brief. As a poetic humorist he towers over two hundred years, with perhaps one rival; but as a poet of history he has no peer in any language or in any age.

His first volume of dramatic monologues, *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), attempted "to distil the atmosphere of a time and a place into a few lines of verse,"<sup>78</sup> and this purpose so dominated the book that the poems were grouped into *Cavalier Tunes*; *Italy and France* ("My Last Duchess" and "Count Gismond"); *Camp and Cloister*, i.e., *I. Camp (French)* ("Incident of the French Camp") and *II. Cloister (Spanish)* ("Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister"); *Queen-Worship* ("Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli" and "Cristina"); and *Madhouse Cells* ("Johannes Agricola" and "Porphyria's Lover"). Besides these, the volume included other historical pictures: "The Pied Piper," "Through the Metidja," "In a Gondola," and "Artemis Prologizes," one of the most successful archaeological reproductions of a Greek divinity as the Greeks conceived their gods to be, not Anglicized. Or turn to the two volumes of *Dramatic Idyls* published towards the end of his life (1879-80), "stories illustrative of the atmosphere of a country and a time."<sup>79</sup> And one of his best historic monologues, "Imperante Augusto Natus Est," was published in his last volume, *Asolando*. Indeed, his long earlier poems showed the same interest without the concentration: *Pippa Passes*, *Sordello*, *Paracelsus*; and in *Pauline* he speaks of

my first dawn of life  
Which passed alone with wisest ancient books  
All halo-girt with fancies of my own;  
And I myself went with the tale—a god

<sup>77</sup> Abercrombie speaks of the *characteristic thinking* in Browning's poems (*The Great Victorians*, p. 82).

<sup>78</sup> DeVane, *Handbook*, p. 97.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385.

Wandering after beauty, or a giant  
 Standing vast in the sunset—an old hunter  
 Talking with gods, or a high-crested chief  
 Sailing with troops of friends to Tenedos.  
 I tell you, naught has ever been so clear  
 As the place, the time, the fashion of those lives:  
 I had not seen a work of lofty art,  
 Nor woman's beauty nor sweet nature's face,  
 Yet, I say, never morn broke clear as those  
 On the dim clustered isles in the blue sea,  
 The deep groves and white temples and wet caves:  
 And nothing ever will surprise me now—  
 Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed,  
 Who bound my forehead with Proserpine's hair.  
 (318-335)

It is a merit of Browning's survey of history that it begins, as our race did begin, not with anthropology but with myth. But when we reach the historic period, "the extraordinary thing" about Browning's poetry is his "use of the ancient world—not romantic after the manner of Milton, or Keats, or any other English poet, but calling that world back to life with the reality and detailed readiness of an archaeologist, or better, of one who had lived in it."<sup>80</sup> We may add that his biographers justly say that Browning "always wrote admirably when he wrote of Jews," and we may turn to a great admirer of the Middle Ages, Ruskin, who declared him "unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages; always vital, right, and profound; so that in the matter of art there is hardly a principle connected with the Medieval temper, that he has not struck upon."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Ruskin said of "The Bishop Orders his Tomb" that he knew of nothing else in our language which told so much about the Renaissance, "its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin."<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Osgood, Charles G., *The Voice of England*, New York, 1935, p. 501; Professor Osgood is referring to *Balaustion's Adventure* and *Aristophanes' Apology*, but the same praise is applicable to other poems.

<sup>81</sup> *Modern Painters, Works*, ed. Cook and Wedderburne, VI, 446 (pt. V, ch. XX, Section 32).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449, sec. 34.



Though he was an Independent, Browning gave us the "Cavalier Tunes," including one of the best drinking songs in English. And for all his bouncing British modernity, there is in his "Ivàn Ivànovitch" as much of the atmosphere of old Russian villages as one gets in three volumes of Russian fiction—and it is the same atmosphere, though the novels, in English translation, were published later. A similar comparison could be made between his poems on the *Ancien Régime* and much more extensive memoirs.

Even his "philosophy" becomes illuminating when it is approached historically rather than logically, for Browning as a thinker is representative of the specific prejudices of his own age—a greater thinker would rise so far above his age as to be of less "documentary value." Browning, for example, illustrates what Arnold was calling the Dissenters' vulgarity and narrowness; he illustrates the weakness of that bourgeois "Liberalism" which Karl Marx was attacking; he illustrates the shoddy anti-Christian religiosity that so many in the Oxford Movement were reacting against. Perhaps we fail to judge such men as Arnold, Marx, Newman, Carlyle, Swinburne, and Hardy accurately unless we realize what they were incited to oppose. We can sympathize with these critics of Victorianism when we read some of Browning's preachings, for Browning was typically "Victorian" in a way that the others were not.

Looked at with historical interest, his very defects become merits. And all his merits and abilities are enhanced in value: his realism, his semi-scientific approach (history cannot be fully scientific), his psychology, his breadth of information (which is worth more in the historian than originality in philosophy), his willingness to speak for unorthodox or even perverse points of view, his love of energy, experience, life in all its forms. What other "Liberal" historian could throw himself so completely into the spirit of the Cavaliers? What other historian could claim to have "Given up myself so many times" as he "Ransacked the ages"; "I myself went with the tale." And the concentration that puts so much into so few pages could be achieved only by a poet, since poetry is more concentrated and

vivid than prose. Especially this type of poet is best adapted to give us history, for while we do not want too much originality of theory in a historian, we do want great originality of style and phrase, so that the very music of his line will help create the appropriate mood: the gravity of a Roman senator, the primitive horror of Russian forests, the classical dignity of Greek tragedy, tight-lipped Renaissance cruelty, or soft Florentine twilight. We need, in short, that combination of romance and realism which was achieved by the Victorians, and by certain Romantics, notably Scott.

And that suggests one reason why Browning is the great poet of history—namely, the century in which he lived. The nineteenth century studied its predecessors more thoroughly than any century ever did, perhaps more than any century ever will. Renan wrote, “L’histoire est la vraie philosophie du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.” The Victorians were especially historical-minded. Not only did they bring the study of history to heights it had never before reached, but they gave us such literary masterpieces in that genre as the productions of Macaulay, Carlyle, Greene, Froude. It should be noticed how many of the other writers dealt with historical material: Thackeray, Pater, Morris, George Eliot—but it would require almost a roll-call of Victorian authors. The concept of historical development conquered science, as the theory of evolution became dominant. It even entered Catholic theology in Newman’s crucial *Development of Christian Doctrine*, and it revolutionized Protestant thought. Moreover, the Victorians wrote for a reading public much better grounded in knowledge of the past than the twentieth-century public; the spread of literacy and of the reading-habit has altered the standards of publishers and reviewers. Of this wide and rich Victorian interest, then, Browning was preëminently the poet. Browning owes this in great measure to his father, whose historical interests and excellent library really constituted Browning’s university and gave him a remarkably extensive, though eccentric, education. Another important influence has been less often mentioned. His biographers point out that he had shown strong historical leanings but had made no attempt

to create a genuine historical background in *Paracelsus*; but in 1837 appeared Carlyle's *French Revolution* which revealed "the value of elaborate detail and of acquaintance with locality."<sup>83</sup>

Browning and Carlyle have one virtue that is attained only by the greatest historians: they treat the problems of the past as real problems. They do this by focussing attention on problems that still seem to them vital, still worth discussing. Consequently they give us flashes of *Geistesgeschichte*, history of thought, even of the typical psychology of the past. For example, in "Cleon" Browning shows us how the advent of Christianity would be looked upon by a highly cultivated Greek—and how he would *feel* about it; in "Karshish" he has shown the same thing from the point of view of an Arabian physician; in "Imperante Augusto Natus Est" the same event as seen by Roman senators. These leaders in the wisdom of this world, in Art, Science, Statesmanship—the great achievements of ancient Classical civilization—look at this new spiritual force with curiosity but without real comprehension. Their very culture has shut their minds from it. And Browning has caught their state of mind and their state of feeling, their whole psychological reaction, with marvelous insight; and then he has had the artistic ability to awaken this insight in his readers. His method, which involves seeing the past *from within*, saves him from a trap his progressive theories might have led him into, the error, into which even some of the greatest historians have fallen, of thinking that there is a verdict of history—that because something was defeated it was not valid—the subtlest and most refined form of the belief that might makes right. It is true that so far as Browning's *philosophy* of history is concerned (as distinguished from his historical pictures), he is in essential agreement with most historians from Macaulay and Carlyle to Charles Beard and the Marxists: like them he gives a realistic, almost pessimistic picture of what has happened in the past, what man has done and how he has acted, and then adds to that a hope in a divine far-off event, a faith in Progress that makes even the evil which

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<sup>83</sup> *Life*, p. 94.

history uncovers seem tolerable. Browning is perhaps the only one of them who frankly calls this hope an illusion that makes life worth living,<sup>84</sup> or who admits that it is not acceptable to the critical reason; that to accept it one must hold the reason in check and stir up the emotions. This, however, is a matter of interpretation. Every historian has a philosophy, conscious or unconscious, and those who preach their interpretation openly are the least insidious. Browning's philosophy is presented directly as theory; it does less to color his picture than that of any historian I know. In fact, it would often be difficult to know from reading one poem just what Browning thought about the speaker. For example, it is only after a thorough study of Browning's thought that one suddenly realizes with a shock that Browning agrees with some of the queer ideas in the two poems he labelled *Madhouse Cells*.

Browning, like all historians, of course, makes mistakes that must be corrected by others. But it is only the greatest re-creators of history, like Gibbon and Shakespeare, Browning and Carlyle, who win the distinction of having the corrections put into footnotes in new editions of their own works. The text itself is never superseded. Browning does not give us military or constitutional history, nor the achievements of eminent men, nor does he swing to the opposite extreme and pretend that history consists in impersonal mass movements. He makes us aware of the reactions of typical men, awake to what is going on. He gives us not dates and statistics but changes of mind, of psychological atmosphere—the real stuff of history, to which public events are mere surface phenomena. He shows “the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.”

Anyone who wishes to see Browning under this aspect, may read the following poems in some such order as that indicated here—beginning with Browning's Greek myth, then his treatment of Classical civilization, its decline, and the rise of Christianity, touching upon Arabians, Jews, Catholics—rising to a climax in his imaginative re-creations of the Renaissance

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<sup>84</sup> In “Apollo and the Fates.”

—and continuing through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to his own day. It is a rare person indeed who does not rise from Browning's musical adventures in psychological history with a broader understanding of the range of experience, the intensity and variety of life.

## POEMS ARRANGED HISTORICALLY BY SUBJECT

Apollo and the Fates. A Prologue.  
 Pan and Luna  
 Artemis Prologizes  
 Pheidippides  
 Echetlos  
 [The Fall of Athens] The beginning of *Aristophanes'*  
*Apology*  
 "Imperante Augusto Natus Est—"  
 Cleon  
 Protus  
 Love Among the Ruins  
 Saul  
 An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience  
 of Karshish, the Arab Physician  
 Muléykeh  
 Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr  
 Rabbi Ben Ezra  
 Holy-Cross Day  
 "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"  
 Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli  
 Count Gismond  
 The Heretic's Tragedy  
 The Pied Piper of Hamelin  
 Old Pictures in Florence  
 Pictor Ignotus  
 Fra Lippo Lippi  
 Andrea del Sarto  
 My Last Duchess  
 The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church  
 A Grammarian's Funeral  
 The Statue and the Bust  
 The Glove

The Laboratory

Johannes Agricola in Meditation

Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the  
Island

Which?

Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha

"How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to  
Aix"

Cavalier Tunes

I. Marching Along

II. Give a Rouse

III. Boot and Saddle

Cristina and Monaldeschi

Hervé Riel

A Forgiveness

The Confessional

Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister

Ivàn Ivànovitch

A Toccata of Galuppi's

Abt Vogler

Clive

Incident of the French Camp

The Flight of the Duchess

Nationality in Drinks

"My heart sank with our Claret-flask"

"Up jumped Tokay on our table"

"Here's to Nelson's memory!"

The Italian in England

The Englishman in Italy

The Patriot

The Lost Leader

Why I am a Liberal

Christmas Eve

"On the first of the Feast of Feasts": Epilogue to  
*Dramatis Personae*

Bishop Blougram's Apology

## CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

### THE CHIEF EVENTS IN BROWNING'S LIFE

- 1811. (February 19) At Camberwell, upper-middle-class suburb of London, marriage of Robert Browning, Senior, and Sarah Anna Wiedemann.
- 1812. (May 7) Birth of Robert Browning, at Camberwell.
- 1826. End of Browning's five or six years as an "unluckily precocious" pupil at the Rev. Thomas Ready's school at Peckham. (He got most of his education at home, in his father's library of 6000 volumes, learning music from his mother and from John Relfe, or visiting the Dulwich Gallery a half-hour's walk away.)
- 1828. (October) Classes begun at London University; Robert Browning one of the first students.
- 1829. (Spring) Left London University, terminating his formal education. Chose poetry as a vocation.
- 1833. (March) Anonymous publication of *Pauline* (Browning's first published poem) at his own expense. It fell dead from the press—not a copy was sold.
- 1834. (March, April) Accompanied the Russian consul general on a mission to St. Petersburg.
- 1835. (August) Publication of *Paracelsus*.
- 1836. (January) Publication of "Porphyria" and "Johannes Agricola" in the *Monthly Repository*.  
(May 26) Supper at Sergeant Talfourd's home at which Wordsworth said, "I am proud to drink to your health, Mr. Browning," and the actor Macready asked Browning to write him a play.
- 1837. (May 1) Browning's first play, *Strafford*, presented at Covent Garden Theatre.
- 1838. (April-July) First visit to Italy (Venice, Asolo, Treviso, Padua, Verona), returning by the Tyrol and the Rhine.

1840. (March) Publication of *Sordello*, so obscure that it ruined his reputation as a writer.
1841. (April) Publication of *Pippa Passes* (as *Bells and Pomegranates*. No. I), his first really distinctive contribution to literature.
- 1842-6. Dramas in the series *Bells and Pomegranates*, concluding with No. VIII, *Luria*; and *A Soul's Tragedy*, which were not acted. He then abandoned the stage.
1842. (November) Publication of *Dramatic Lyrics* (*Bells and Pomegranates*. No. III), his first volume of "dramatic monologues."
1844. (Summer to December) Second Italian journey.  
[Elizabeth Barrett Barrett: born March 6, 1806; invalid from 1838; in her *Poems*, 1844, mentioned Browning alongside Wordsworth and Tennyson.]
1845. (January 10) Browning's first letter to Elizabeth Barrett.  
(May 20) Robert Browning met Elizabeth Barrett and immediately wrote her a declaration of his love. By September she acknowledged him as a lover. The affair was kept secret throughout the courtship.  
(November 6) Publication of *Dramatic Romances* (*Bells and Pomegranates*. No. VII).
1846. (September 12) Secret marriage of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett at Marylebone Church, London. Five days later she slipped out of her home and they left for Italy.
1847. (April) They made their home in Florence, until her death fourteen years later.
1849. (March 9) Birth of their son, Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning.
1850. (April 1) Publication of *Christmas Eve and Easter-Day*.
1855. (November) Publication of *Men and Women*, in two volumes.
1856. (December) Death of John Kenyon, who had introduced Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett. He left them £11,000.
1861. (June 29) Death of Mrs. Browning.  
(August 1) Browning leaves Florence forever.



1864. (May 28) Publication of *Dramatis Personae*, which won him popularity at last.
1868. (November 21–February 27, 1869) Publication of *The Ring and the Book*.
- 1871–8. Publication chiefly of long argumentative poems like *Fifine at the Fair* and *Aristophanes' Apology*.
1876. (July) Publication of *Pacchiarotto . . . With Other Poems*.
1879. (April) Publication of the first series of *Dramatic Idyls*.
1880. (June) Publication of *Dramatic Idyls Second Series*.
1881. (October) Founding of the Browning Society.
1883. (March) Publication of *Jocoseria*.
- 1883–5. Publication of sonnets.
1884. (November) Publication of *Ferishtah's Fancies*.
1887. (January) Publication of *Parleyings With Certain People*.
1889. (Autumn) Journey over the Alps to Italy (Asolo, etc.)  
(December 12) Publication of *Asolando*.  
(December 12) Death of Browning at his son's home, the Palazzo Rezzonico, in Venice. He was buried in the Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey.

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Santayana, George, "The Poetry of Barbarism," in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, New York, 1900.

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Scott, Dixon, "The Homeliness of Browning," in *Men of Letters*, London, 1916.

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Sherwood, Margaret, "The Young Browning" and "Browning and Mr. Santayana," in *Undercurrents of Influence in English Romantic Poetry*, Cambridge, 1934.

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Somervell, D. C., "The Reputation of Robert Browning," in *Essays and Studies of the English Association*, XV, Oxford, 1929.

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**PIPPA PASSES**



# PIPPA PASSES\*

A DRAMA

## PERSONS

|                          |                                  |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| PIPPA.                   | PHENE.                           |
| OTTIMA.                  | <i>Austrian Police.</i>          |
| SEBALD.                  | BLUPHOCKS.                       |
| <i>Foreign Students.</i> | LUIGI <i>and his Mother.</i>     |
| GOTTLIEB.                | <i>Poor Girls.</i>               |
| SCHRAMM.                 | MONSIGNOR <i>and his attend-</i> |
| JULES.                   | <i>ants.</i>                     |

## INTRODUCTION

NEW YEAR'S DAY AT ASOLO IN THE TREVISAN

SCENE—*A large mean airy chamber. A girl, PIPPA, from the Silk-mills, springing out of bed.*

DAY!

Faster and more fast,  
O'er night's brim, day boils at last:

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\* The earliest of Browning's works that has won general admiration, this was published in 1841 as the first of a series of eight pamphlets called *Bells and Pomegranates*. As a foreword to the last of the series (1846) the poet wrote, "I only meant by that title to indicate an endeavour towards something like an alternation, or mixture, of music with discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with thought."

*Pippa Passes* is typical of Browning's poetry in its optimism, its romantic lyrics, its psychological interest in emotional crisis, and its unusual form: dramatic, but not well adapted to the stage. Moreover, it conveys a very vivid sense of life in an Italian town in the 1830's, with its churchmen, Austrian police, foreign students, mill-owners and laborers, and revolutionary conspirators. Browning's first visit to Italy (1838), in search of local color for *Sordello*, took him to Venice and to Asolo, about thirty miles away, a small town in the province of Treviso, famous for its silk mills. He was delighted with the place, visited it again in the last years of his life, and used its name in the title of his last volume of poetry, *Asolando*.



Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim  
 Where spurting and suppressed it lay, 5  
 For not a froth-flake touched the rim  
 Of yonder gap in the solid gray  
 Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;  
 But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,  
 Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed, 10  
 Rose, reddened, and its seething breast  
 Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world.

Oh, Day, if I squander a wavelet of thee,  
 A mite of my twelve hours' treasure,  
 The least of thy gazes or glances, 15  
 (Be they grants thou art bound to or gifts above measure)  
 One of thy choices or one of thy chances,  
 (Be they tasks God imposed thee or freaks at thy pleasure)  
 —My Day, if I squander such labour or leisure,  
 Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me! 20

Thy long blue solemn hours serenely flowing,  
 Whence earth, we feel, gets steady help and good—  
 Thy fitful sunshine-minutes, coming, going,  
 As if earth turned from work in gamesome mood—  
 All shall be mine! But thou must treat me not 25  
 As prosperous ones are treated, those who live  
 At hand here, and enjoy the higher lot,  
 In readiness to take what thou wilt give,  
 And free to let alone what thou refusest;  
 For, Day, my holiday, if thou ill-usest 30  
 Me, who am only Pippa,—old-year's sorrow,  
 Cast off last night, will come again to-morrow:  
 Whereas, if thou prove gentle, I shall borrow  
 Sufficient strength of thee for new-year's sorrow.  
 All other men and women that this earth 35  
 Belongs to, who all days alike possess,  
 Make general plenty cure particular dearth,  
 Get more joy one way, if another, less:  
 Thou art my single day, God lends to heaven  
 What were all earth else, with a feel of heaven,— 40  
 Sole light that helps me through the year, thy sun's!  
 Try now! Take Asolo's Four Happiest Ones—

And let thy morning rain on that superb  
 Great haughty Ottima; can rain disturb  
 Her Sebald's homage? All the while thy rain 45  
 Beats fiercest on her shrub-house window-pane,  
 He will but press the closer, breathe more warm  
 Against her cheek; how should she mind the storm?  
 And, morning past, if mid-day shed a gloom  
 O'er Jules and Phene,—what care bride and groom 50  
 Save for their dear selves? 'T is their marriage-day;  
 And while they leave church and go home their way,  
 Hand clasping hand, within each breast would be  
 Sunbeams and pleasant weather spite of thee.  
 Then, for another trial, obscure thy eve 55  
 With mist,—will Luigi and his mother grieve—  
 The lady and her child, unmatched, forsooth,  
 She in her age, as Luigi in his youth,  
 For true content? The cheerful town, warm, close  
 And safe, the sooner that thou art morose, 60  
 Receives them. And yet once again, outbreak  
 In storm at night on Monsignor, they make  
 Such stir about,—whom they expect from Rome  
 To visit Asolo, his brothers' home,  
 And say here masses proper to release 65  
 A soul from pain,—what storm dares hurt his peace?  
 Calm would be pray, with his own thoughts to ward  
 Thy thunder off, nor want the angels' guard.  
 But Pippa—just one such mischance would spoil  
 Her day that lightens the next twelvemonth's toil 70  
 At wearisome silk-winding, coil on coil!  
 And here I let time slip for naught!  
 Aha, you foolhardy sunbeam, caught  
 With a single splash from my ewer!  
 You that would mock the best pursuer, 75  
 Was my basin over-deep?  
 One splash of water ruins you asleep,  
 And up, up, fleet your brilliant bits  
 Wheeling and counterwheeling,

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71. Browning's cheerful picture of Pippa, a girl employed at "wearisome" toil in the silk mills, should be contrasted with the humanitarian protest against child-labor, "The Cry of the Children," written by Elizabeth Barrett, who was to become his wife.

Reeling, broken beyond healing: 80  
 Now grow together on the ceiling!  
 That will task your wits.  
 Whoever it was quenched fire first, hoped to see  
 Morsel after morsel flee  
 As merrily, as giddily . . . 85  
 Meantime, what lights my sunbeam on,  
 Where settles by degrees the radiant cripple?  
 Oh, is it surely blown, my martagon?  
 New-blown and ruddy as St. Agnes' nipple,  
 Plump as the flesh-bunch on some Turk bird's poll! 90  
 Be sure if corals, branching 'neath the ripple  
 Of ocean, bud there,—fairies watch unroll  
 Such turban-flowers; I say, such lamps disperse  
 Thick red flame through that dusk green universe!  
 I am queen of thee, floweret! 95  
 And each fleshy blossom  
 Preserve I not—(safer  
 Than leaves that embower it,  
 Or shells that embosom)  
 —From weevil and chafer? 100  
 Laugh through my pane then; solicit the bee;  
 Gibe him, be sure; and, in midst of thy glee,  
 Love thy queen, worship me!  
 —Worship whom else? For am I not, this day,  
 Whate'er I please? What shall I please to-day? 105  
 My morn, noon, eve and night—how spend my day?  
 To-morrow I must be Pippa who winds silk,  
 The whole year round, to earn just bread and milk:  
 But, this one day, I have leave to go,  
 And play out my fancy's fullest games; 110  
 I may fancy all day—and it shall be so—  
 That I taste of the pleasures, am called by the names  
 Of the Happiest Four in our Asolol

88. *Martagon*: kind of lily with light violet or flesh-colored flowers.

100. *Weevil and chafer*: small beetles.

108. Such references as this in Browning's poetry are not to be taken as protests or demands for reform. He did not believe that evils should be eliminated, but, rather, confronted with a rush of high spirits in the mood of the lyrics of this play. Is it dramatically appropriate to ascribe these feelings to one who leads the life of Pippa?

See! Up the hill-side yonder, through the morning,  
 Some one shall love me, as the world calls love: 115  
 I am no less than Ottima, take warning!  
 The gardens, and the great stone house above,  
 And other house for shrubs, all glass in front,  
 Are mine; where Sebald steals, as he is wont,  
 To court me, while old Luca yet reposes: 120  
 And therefore, till the shrub-house door uncloses,  
 I . . . what now?—give abundant cause for prate  
 About me—Ottima, I mean—of late,  
 Too bold, too confident she'll still face down  
 The spitefullest of talkers in our town. 125  
 How we talk in the little town below!  
 But love, love, love—there's better love, I know!  
 This foolish love was only day's first offer;  
 I choose my next love to defy the scoffer:  
 For do not our Bride and Bridegroom sally 130  
 Out of Possagno church at noon?  
 Their house looks over Orcana valley:  
 Why should not I be the bride as soon  
 As Ottima? For I saw, beside,  
 Arrive last night that little bride— 135  
 Saw, if you call it seeing her, one flash  
 Of the pale snow-pure cheek and black bright tresses,  
 Blacker than all except the black eyelash;  
 I wonder she contrives those lids no dresses!  
 —So strict was she, the veil 140  
 Should cover close her pale  
 Pure cheeks—a bride to look at and scarce touch,  
 Scarce touch, remember, Jules! For are not such  
 Used to be tended, flower-like, every feature,  
 As if one's breath would fray the lily of a creature? 145  
 A soft and easy life these ladies lead:  
 Whiteness in us were wonderful indeed.

110–113. Browning is like Pippa not only in his exuberance and optimism, but also, as his biographers Griffin and Minchin point out (*Life*, 35–6), in his own great joy in imagining himself to be other people. This taste led him to develop the “dramatic monologue,” a form best adapted to his genius, by which he played out his “fancy's fullest games.” Even this “play” is carried forward less by dialogue than by a series of monologues.

131. *Possagno church*: a church designed by Canova, who was born at Possagno.

Oh, save that brow its virgin dimness,  
 Keep that foot its lady primness,  
 Let those ankles never swerve 150  
 From their exquisite reserve,  
 Yet have to trip along the streets like me,  
 All but naked to the knee!  
 How will she ever grant her Jules a bliss  
 So startling as her real first infant kiss? 155  
 Oh, no—not envy, this!

—Not envy, sure!—for if you gave me  
 Leave to take or to refuse,  
 In earnest, do you think I'd choose  
 That sort of new love to enslave me? 160  
 Mine should have lapped me round from the beginning;  
 As little fear of losing it as winning:  
 Lovers grow cold, men learn to hate their wives,  
 And only parents' love can last our lives.  
 At eve the Son and Mother, gentle pair, 165  
 Commune inside our turret: what prevents  
 My being Luigi? While that mossy lair  
 Of lizards through the winter-time is stirred  
 With each to each imparting sweet intents  
 For this new-year, as brooding bird to bird— 170  
 (For I observe of late, the evening walk  
 Of Luigi and his mother, always ends  
 Inside our ruined turret, where they talk,  
 Calmer than lovers, yet more kind than friends)  
 —Let me be cared about, kept out of harm, 175  
 And schemed for, safe in love as with a charm;  
 Let me be Luigi! If I only knew  
 What was my mother's face—my father, too!  
 Nay, if you come to that, best love of all  
 Is God's; then why not have God's love befall 180  
 Myself as, in the palace by the Dome,  
 Monsignor?—who to-night will bless the home  
 Of his dead brother; and God bless in turn  
 That heart which beats, those eyes which mildly burn  
 With love for all men! I, to-night at least, 185  
 Would be that holy and beloved priest.

181. *Dome* (Duomo): cathedral.

Now wait!—even I already seem to share  
 In God's love: what does New-year's hymn declare?  
 What other meaning do these verses bear?

*All service ranks the same with God:* 190  
*If now, as formerly he trod*  
*Paradise, his presence fills*  
*Our earth, each only as God wills*  
*Can work—God's puppets, best and worst,*  
*Are we; there is no last nor first.* 195  
*Say not "a small event!" Why "small"?*  
*Costs it more pain that this, ye call*  
*A "great event," should come to pass,*  
*Than that? Untwine me from the mass*  
*Of deeds which make up life, one deed* 200  
*Power shall fall short in or exceed!*

And more of it, and more of it!—oh yes—  
 I will pass each, and see their happiness,  
 And envy none—being just as great, no doubt,  
 Useful to men, and dear to God, as they! 205  
 A pretty thing to care about  
 So mightily, this single holiday!  
 But let the sun shine! Wherefore repine?  
 —With thee to lead me, O Day of mine,

188. The four groups illustrate four kinds of love in an ascending scale: adulterous love involving murder, wedded love, parental love (and love of country), Christian love institutionalized; and Pippa realizes that she represents a fifth love—God's love for all mankind equally, even for a poor factory girl. Pippa does not realize the flaw in each of the other four examples of love, nor that her joyous, exuberant overflow of spirits is to save all these supposedly "Happiest Four" from impending disaster.

190 ff. Catholicism does not teach that "all service ranks the same with God," that "there is no last nor first," and that men are "God's puppets." This song is less that of a young Italian factory girl than an expression of Browning himself, strongly influenced by the nineteenth-century currents of Romanticism and the liberalism of his own middle class, and by his Evangelical (Dissenter) background. Cf. the Calvinistic belief that no good works can merit salvation, that God's grace is a free gift granted not for human virtue but according to unconditional election by God according to His eternal decrees, and that men's actions have been predestined by God throughout all eternity. Evangelical emphasis on sudden conversion may also be seen in the psychology of the situations in this play.

201. Notice Browning's interest in the Great Moment, the crisis, in which the soul either fails or rushes over to victory in an excess of power.

Down the grass path grey with dew,  
 Under the pine-wood, blind with boughs,  
 Where the swallow never flew  
 Nor yet cicala dared carouse—  
 No, dared carouse!

210

[*She enters the street.*]

## PART I

## MORNING

SCENE.—*Up the Hill-side, inside the Shrub-house. LUCA's wife, OTTIMA, and her paramour, the German SEBALD.*

*Sebald* [*sings*].

*Let the watching lids wink!  
 Day's a-blaze with eyes, think!  
 Deep into the night, drink!*

*Ottima.* Night? Such may be your Rhine-land nights perhaps;

But this blood-red beam through the shutter's chink 5  
 —We call such light, the morning: let us see!  
 Mind how you grope your way, though! How these tall  
 Naked geraniums straggle! Push the lattice  
 Behind that frame!—Nay, do I bid you?—*Sebald*,  
 It shakes the dust down on me! Why, of course 10  
 The slide-bolt catches. Well, are you content,  
 Or must I find you something else to spoil?  
 Kiss and be friends, my *Sebald*! Is 't full morning?  
 Oh, don't speak then!

*Sebald.* Ay, thus it used to be.  
 Ever your house was, I remember, shut 15  
 Till mid-day; I observed that, as I strolled  
 On mornings through the vale here; country girls  
 Were noisy, washing garments in the brook,  
 Hinds drove the slow white oxen up the hills:  
 But no, your house was mute, would ope no eye. 20  
 And wisely: you were plotting one thing there,  
 Nature, another outside. I looked up—  
 Rough white wood shutters, rusty iron bars,

Silent as death, blind in a flood of light.  
 Oh, I remember!—and the peasants laughed 25  
 And said, "The old man sleeps with the young wife."  
 This house was his, this chair, this window—his.

*Ottima.* Ah, the clear morning! I can see Saint Mark's;  
 That black streak is the belfry. Stop: Vicenza  
 Should lie . . . there's Padua, plain enough, that blue! 30  
 Look o'er my shoulder, follow my finger!

*Sebald.* Morning?

It seems to me a night with a sun added.  
 Where's dew, where's freshness? That bruised plant, I bruised  
 In getting through the lattice yestereve,  
 Droops as it did. See, here's my elbow's mark 35  
 I' the dust o' the sill.

*Ottima.* Oh, shut the lattice, pray!

*Sebald.* Let me lean out. I cannot scent blood here,  
 Foul as the morn may be.

There, shut the world out!

How do you feel now, Ottima? There, curse  
 The world and all outside! Let us throw off 40  
 This mask: how do you bear yourself? Let's out  
 With all of it.

*Ottima.* Best never speak of it.

*Sebald.* Best speak again and yet again of it,  
 Till words cease to be more than words. "His blood,"  
 For instance—let those two words mean "His blood" 45  
 And nothing more. Notice, I'll say them now,  
 "His blood."

*Ottima.* Assuredly if I repented  
 The deed—

*Sebald.* Repent? Who should repent, or why?  
 What puts that in your head? Did I once say  
 That I repented?

*Ottima.* No, I said the deed . . . 50

*Sebald.* "The deed" and "the event"—just now it was  
 "Our passion's fruit"—the devil take such cant!  
 Say, once and always, Luca was a wittol,  
 I am his cut-throat, you are . . .

28. *Saint Mark's*: the cathedral at Venice, which is visible from Asolo.

29. *Vicenza*: a town southwest of Asolo.

30. *Padua*: famous Italian city, about twenty-five miles south of Asolo.



*Ottima.* Here's the wine;  
I brought it when we left the house above, 55  
And glasses too—wine of both sorts. Black? White then?

*Sebald.* But am not I his cut-throat? What are you?

*Ottima.* There trudges on his business from the Duomo  
Benet the Capuchin, with his brown hood  
And bare feet; always in one place at church, 60  
Close under the stone wall by the south entry.

I used to take him for a brown cold piece  
Of the wall's self, as out of it he rose  
To let me pass—at first, I say, I used:  
Now, so has that dumb figure fastened on me, 65  
I rather should account the plastered wall  
A piece of him, so chilly does it strike.

This, Sebald?

*Sebald.* No, the white wine—the white wine!  
Well, Ottima, I promised no new year  
Should rise on us the ancient shameful way; 70  
Nor does it rise. Pour on! To your black eyes!  
Do you remember last damned New Year's day?

*Ottima.* You brought those foreign prints. We looked  
at them

Over the wine and fruit. I had to scheme  
To get him from the fire. Nothing but saying 75  
His own set wants the proof-mark, roused him up  
To hunt them out.

*Sebald.* 'Faith, he is not alive  
To fondle you before my face.

*Ottima.* Do you  
Fondle me then! Who means to take your life  
For that, my Sebald?

*Sebald.* Hark you, Ottima! 80  
One thing to guard against. We'll not make much  
One of the other—that is, not make more  
Parade of warmth, childish officious coil,

58. *Duomo*: Italian for "Cathedral."

59. *Capuchin*: member of an order of friars, an offshoot of the Franciscans. The Capuchins wear a brown habit.

76. *Proof-mark*: the sign on a print showing that it is one of the first from the plate. This charge was therefore a challenge to Luca as to the value of his collection.

83. *Coil*: tumult, bustle.

Than yesterday: as if, sweet, I supposed  
 Proof upon proof were needed now, now first, 85  
 To show I love you—yes, still love you—love you  
 In spite of Luca and what's come to him  
 —Sure sign we had him ever in our thoughts,  
 White sneering old reproachful face and all!  
 We'll even quarrel, love, at times, as if 90  
 We still could lose each other, were not tied  
 By this: conceive you?

*Ottima.* Love!

*Sebald.* Not tied so sure.

Because though I was wrought upon, have struck  
 His insolence back into him—am I  
 So surely yours?—therefore forever yours? 95

*Ottima.* Love, to be wise, (one counsel pays another)  
 Should we have—months ago, when first we loved,  
 For instance that May morning we two stole  
 Under the green ascent of sycamores—  
 If we had come upon a thing like that 100  
 Suddenly . . .

*Sebald.* “A thing”—there again—“a thing!”

*Ottima.* Then, Venus' body, had we come upon  
 My husband Luca Gaddi's murdered corpse  
 Within there, at his couch-foot, covered close—  
 Would you have pored upon it? Why persist 105  
 In poring now upon it? For 't is here  
 As much as there in the deserted house:  
 You cannot rid your eyes of it. For me,  
 Now he is dead I hate him worse: I hate . . .  
 Dare you stay here? I would go back and hold 110  
 His two dead hands, and say, “I hate you worse,  
 Luca, than . . .”

*Sebald.* Off, off—take your hands off mine,  
 'T is the hot evening—off! oh, morning is it?

*Ottima.* There's one thing must be done; you know  
 what thing.

Come in and help to carry. We may sleep 115  
 Anywhere in the whole wide house to-night.

*Sebald.* What would come, think you, if we let  
 him lie  
 Just as he is? Let him lie there until

The angels take him! He is turned by this  
Off from his face beside, as you will see. 120

*Ottima.* This dusty pane might serve for looking glass.  
Three, four—four gray hairs! Is it so you said  
A plait of hair should wave across my neck?  
No—this way.

*Sebald.* Ottima, I would give your neck,  
Each splendid shoulder, both those breasts of yours, 125  
That this were undone! Killing! Kill the world  
So Luca lives again!—ay, lives to sputter  
His fulsome dotage on you—yes, and feign  
Surprise that I return at eve to sup,  
When all the morning I was loitering here— 130  
Bid me despatch my business and begone.  
I would . . .

*Ottima.* See!

*Sebald.* No, I'll finish. Do you think  
I fear to speak the bare truth once for all?  
All we have talked of, is, at bottom, fine  
To suffer; there's a recompense in guilt; 135  
One must be venturous and fortunate:  
What is one young for, else? In age we'll sigh  
O'er the wild reckless wicked days flown over;  
Still, we have lived: the vice was in its place.  
But to have eaten Luca's bread, have worn 140  
His clothes, have felt his money swell my purse—  
Do lovers in romances sin that way?  
Why, I was starving when I used to call  
And teach you music, starving while you plucked me  
These flowers to smell!

*Ottima.* My poor lost friend!

*Sebald.* He gave me 145  
Life, nothing less: what if he did reproach  
My perfidy, and threaten, and do more—  
Had he no right? What was to wonder at?  
He sat by us at table quietly:  
Why must you lean across till our cheeks touched? 150  
Could he do less than make pretence to strike?  
'T is not the crime's sake—I'd commit ten crimes

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119-20. It is a superstition that the face of a murdered man looks skyward for vengeance.

Greater, to have this crime wiped out, undone!  
And you—O how feel you? Feel you for me?

*Ottima.* Well then, I love you better now than ever, 155

And best (look at me while I speak to you)—

Best for the crime; nor do I grieve, in truth,

This mask, this simulated ignorance,

This affectation of simplicity,

Falls off our crime; this naked crime of ours 160

May not now be looked over: look it down!

Great? let it be great; but the joys it brought,

Pay they or no its price? Come: they or it!

Speak not! The past, would you give up the past

Such as it is, pleasure and crime together? 165

Give up that noon I owned my love for you?

The garden's silence: even the single bee

Persisting in his toil, suddenly stopped,

And where he hid you only could surmise

By some campanula chalice set a-swing. 170

Who stammered—"Yes, I love you?"

*Sebald.* And I drew

Back; put far back your face with both my hands

Lest you should grow too full of me—your face

So seemed athirst for my whole soul and body!

*Ottima.* And when I ventured to receive you here, 175

Made you steal hither in the mornings—

*Sebald.* When

I used to look up 'neath the shrub-house here,

Till the red fire on its glazed windows spread

To a yellow haze?

*Ottima.* Ah—my sign was, the sun

Inflamed the sere side of yon chestnut-tree

Nipped by the first frost. 180

*Sebald.* You would always laugh

At my wet boots: I had to stride thro' grass

Over my ankles.

*Ottima.* Then our crowning night!

*Sebald.* The July night?

*Ottima.* The day of it too, Sebald!

When heaven's pillars seemed o'erbowed with heat, 185

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170. *Campanula*: "little bell," the Latin name of the bell-flower (hare-bell).

Its black-blue canopy suffered descend  
 Close on us both, to weigh down each to each,  
 And smother up all life except our life.  
 So lay we till the storm came.

*Sebald.* How it came!

*Ottima.* Buried in woods we lay, you recollect; 190  
 Swift ran the searching tempest overhead;  
 And ever and anon some bright white shaft  
 Burned thro' the pine-tree roof, here burned and there,  
 As if God's messenger thro' the close wood screen  
 Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture, 195  
 Feeling for guilty thee and me: then broke  
 The thunder like a whole sea overhead—

*Sebald.* Yes!

*Ottima.* While I stretched myself upon you, hands  
 To hands, my mouth to your hot mouth, and shook  
 All my locks loose, and covered you with them— 200  
 You, Sebald, the same you!

*Sebald.* Slower, Ottima!

*Ottima.* And as we lay—

*Sebald.* Less vehemently! Love me!  
 Forgive me! Take not words, mere words, to heart!  
 Your breath is worse than wine. Breathe slow, speak slow!  
 Do not lean on me!

*Ottima.* Sebald, as we lay, 205  
 Rising and falling only with our pants,  
 Who said, "Let death come now! 'T is right to die!  
 Right to be punished! Naught completes such bliss  
 But woe!" Who said that?

*Sebald.* How did we ever rise?  
 Was't that we slept? Why did it end?

*Ottima.* I felt you 210  
 Taper into a point the ruffled ends  
 Of my loose locks 'twixt both your humid lips.  
 My hair is fallen now: knot it again!

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200. Cf. the opening lines of Browning's first published work, *Pauline: a Fragment of a Confession* (1833):

Pauline, mine own, bend o'er me—thy soft breast  
 Shall pant to mine—bend o'er me—thy sweet eyes,  
 And loosened hair and breathing lips, and arms  
 Drawing me to thee—these build up a screen  
 To shut me in with thee, and from all fear.

*Sebald.* I kiss you now, dear Ottima, now and now!  
This way? Will you forgive me—be once more 215  
My great queen?

*Ottima.* Bind it thrice about my brow;  
Crown me your queen, your spirit's arbitress,  
Magnificent in sin. Say that!

*Sebald.* I crown you  
My great white queen, my spirit's arbitress,  
Magnificent . . . 220

[*From without is heard the voice of PIPPA singing—*

*The year's at the spring  
And day's at the morn;  
Morning's at seven;  
The hill-side's dew-pearled;  
The lark's on the wing; 225  
The snail's on the thorn:  
God's in his heaven—  
All's right with the world*

[*PIPPA passes.*

*Sebald.* God's in his heaven! Do you hear that? Who  
spoke?  
You, you spoke!

227-8. It has been argued that Pippa's songs can not be taken to express Browning's own sentiment; e.g., Abercrombie in *The Great Victorians* (pp. 76 ff.) says these two lines are "the one distinct piece of evidence" that Browning was really an optimist, but that this lyric is purely dramatic, "the right sort of song for such a person as she is." Now one may doubt that a person with the background of Pippa, in such a situation, would be so utterly pleased with the happiness of others. And it should be noticed that the very plot of the play—entirely Browning's invention—is strikingly optimistic: Browning gives us realistic pictures of four groups of people in the midst of sin, disaster, and tragedy. Then, suddenly, in each case they are saved as by a *deus ex machina* through overhearing Pippa's songs. This is presented as not a mere accident, but a result of the very nature of the universe, where men are "God's puppets" and His "presence fills our earth." "God's in his heaven." And to Browning, who did not care for logic or for the Christian contempt for the world, this led to the conclusion that basically "All's right with the world." Human nature is shown to be full of virtue; and even after a long entanglement in sin and error, it takes only Pippa's snatches of song to awaken the better self in each of these people and loose a flood of good emotions, remorse, pity, forgiveness, courage. The philosophy implied by this plot was preached by Browning repeatedly until the very end of his life.

- Ottima.* Oh—that little ragged girl! 230  
 She must have rested on the step: we give them  
 But this one holiday the whole year round.  
 Did you ever see our silk-mills—their inside?  
 There are ten silk-mills now belong to you.  
 She stoops to pick my double heartsease . . . Sh! 235  
 She does not hear: call you out louder!
- Sebald.* Leave me!  
 Go, get your clothes on—dress those shoulders!
- Ottima.* Sebald?  
*Sebald.* Wipe off that paint! I hate you.  
*Ottima.* Miserable!  
*Sebald.* My God, and she is emptied of it now!
- Outright now!—how miraculously gone 240  
 All of the grace—had she not strange grace once?  
 Why, the blank cheek hangs listless as it likes  
 No purpose holds the features up together,  
 Only the cloven brow and puckered chin  
 Stay in their places: and the very hair, 245  
 That seemed to have a sort of life in it,  
 Drops, a dead web!
- Ottima.* Speak to me—not of me!  
*Sebald.* That round great full-orbed face, where not an  
 angle  
 Broke the delicious indolence—all broken!
- Ottima.* To me—not of me! Ungrateful, perjured  
 cheat! 250  
 A coward too: but ingrate's worse than all.  
 Beggar—my slave—a fawning, cringing lie!  
 Leave me! Betray me! I can see your drift!  
 A lie that walks and eats and drinks!
- Sebald.* My God!  
 Those morbid olive faultless shoulder-blades— 255  
 I should have known there was no blood beneath!
- Ottima.* You hate me then? You hate me then?  
*Sebald.* To think  
 She would succeed in her absurd attempt,  
 And fascinate by sinning, show herself  
 Superior—guilt from its excess superior 260  
 To innocence! That little peasant's voice

235. *Heartsease*: species of violet, or pansy.

Has righted all again. Though I be lost,  
 I know which is the better, never fear,  
 Of vice or virtue, purity or lust,  
 Nature or trick! I see what I have done, 265  
 Entirely now! Oh I am proud to feel  
 Such torments—let the world take credit thence—  
 I, having done my deed, pay too its price!  
 I hate, hate—curse you! God's in his heaven!

*Ottima.*

—Mel

Mel! no, no, Sebald, not yourself—kill me! 270  
 Mine is the whole crime. Do but kill me—then  
 Yourself—then—presently—first hear me speak!  
 I always meant to kill myself—wait, you!  
 Lean on my breast—not as a breast; don't love me  
 The more because you lean on me, my own 275  
 Heart's Sebald! There, there, both deaths presently!

*Sebald.* My brain is drowned now—quite drowned: all I  
 feel

Is . . . is, at swift-recurring intervals,  
 A hurry-down within me, as of waters  
 Loosened to smother up some ghastly pit: 280  
 There they go—whirls from a black fiery sea!

*Ottima.* Not me—to him, O God, be merciful!

*Talk by the way, while PIPPA is passing from the hill-side to  
 Orcana. Foreign Students of painting and sculpture, from  
 Venice, assembled opposite the house of JULES, a young  
 French statuary, at Possagno.*

*1st Student.* Attention! My own post is beneath this win-  
 dow, but the pomegranate clump yonder will hide three or four  
 of you with a little squeezing, and Schramm and his pipe must  
 lie flat in the balcony. Four, five—who's a defaulter? We  
 want everybody, for Jules must not be suffered to hurt his  
 bride when the jest's found out.

*2nd Student.* All here! Only our poet's away—never having  
 much meant to be present, moonstrike him! The airs of that  
 fellow, that Giovacchino! He was in violent love with himself,  
 and had a fair prospect of thriving in his suit, so unmolested  
 was it,—when suddenly a woman falls in love with him, too;



and out of pure jealousy he takes himself off to Trieste,<sup>1</sup> immortal poem and all: whereto is this prophetic epitaph appended already, as Bluphocks assures me,—“*Here a mammoth-poem lies, Fouled to death by butterflies.*” His own fault, the simpleton! Instead of cramp couplets, each like a knife in your entrails, he should write, says Bluphocks, both classically and intelligibly.—*Æsculapius*,<sup>2</sup> *an Epic. Catalogue of the drugs: Hebe’s*<sup>3</sup> *plaister—One strip Cools your lip. Phæbus*<sup>4</sup> *emulsion—One bottle Clears your throttle. Mercury’s*<sup>5</sup> *bolus—One box Cures . . .*

*3rd Student.* Subside, my fine fellow! If the marriage was over by ten o’clock, Jules will certainly be here in a minute with his bride.

*2nd Student.* Good!—only, so should the poet’s muse have been universally acceptable, says Bluphocks, *et canibus nostris*<sup>6</sup> . . . and Delia not better known to our literary dogs than the boy Giovacchino!

*1st Student.* To the point, now. Where’s Gottlieb, the new-comer? Oh,—listen, Gottlieb, to what has called down this piece of friendly vengeance on Jules, of which we now assemble to witness the winding-up. We are all agreed, all in a tale,<sup>7</sup> observe, when Jules shall burst out on us in a fury by and by: I am spokesman—the verses that are to undeceive Jules bear my name of Lutwyche—but each professes himself alike insulted by this strutting stone-squarer, who came alone from Paris to Munich, and thence with a crowd of us to Venice and Possagno here, but proceeds in a day or two alone again—oh, alone indubitably!—to Rome and Florence. He, forsooth, take up his portion with these dissolute, brutalized, heartless bunglers!—so he was heard to call us all. Now, is Schramm brutalized, I should like to know? Am I heartless?

<sup>1</sup> *Trieste*: Italian city on the Adriatic, across from Venice.

<sup>2</sup> *Æsculapius*: god of medicine.

<sup>3</sup> *Hebe*: goddess of youth, and cup-bearer to the gods.

<sup>4</sup> *Phæbus*: Apollo, god of healing, father of *Æsculapius*.

<sup>5</sup> *Mercury*: messenger of the gods, god of travel and commerce.

<sup>6</sup> *Et canibus nostris*: “and to our dogs” (Virgil, *Eclagues*, III, 67).

<sup>7</sup> *In a tale*: ready to tell the same tale.

*Gottlieb.* Why, somewhat heartless; for, suppose Jules a coxcomb as much as you choose, still, for this mere coxcombry, you will have brushed off—what do folks style it?—the bloom of his life. Is it too late to alter? These love-letters now, you call his—I can't laugh at them.

*4th Student.* Because you never read the sham letters of our inditing which drew forth these.

*Gottlieb.* His discovery of the truth will be frightful.

*4th Student.* That's the joke. But you should have joined us at the beginning: there's no doubt he loves the girl—loves a model he might hire by the hour!

*Gottlieb.* See here! "He has been accustomed," he writes, "to have Canova's<sup>8</sup> women about him, in stone, and the world's women beside him, in flesh; these being as much below, as those above, his soul's aspiration: but now he is to have the reality." There you laugh again! I say, you wipe off the very dew of his youth.

*1st Student.* Schramm! (Take the pipe out of his mouth, somebody!) Will Jules lose the bloom of his youth?

*Schramm.* Nothing worth keeping is ever lost in this world: look at a blossom—it drops presently, having done its service and lasted its time; but fruits succeed, and where would be the blossom's place could it continue? As well affirm that your eye is no longer in your body, because its earliest favourite, whatever it may have first loved to look on, is dead and done with—as that any affection is lost to the soul when its first object, whatever happened first to satisfy it, is superseded in due course. Keep but ever looking, whether with the body's eye or the mind's, and you will soon find something to look on! Has a man done wondering at women?—there follow men, dead and alive, to wonder at. Has he done wondering at men?—there's God to wonder at: and the faculty of wonder may be, at the same time, old and tired enough with respect to its first object, and yet young and fresh sufficiently, so far as concern s its novel one. Thus . . .

*1st Student.* Put Schramm's pipe into his mouth again!

<sup>8</sup> *Canova*: Italian sculptor (1757–1822).

There, you see! Well, this Jules . . . a wretched fribble—oh, I watched his disportings at Possagno, the other day! Canova's gallery—you know: there he marches first resolvedly past great works by the dozen without vouchsafing an eye: all at once he stops full at the *Psiche-fanciulla*<sup>9</sup>—cannot pass that old acquaintance without a nod of encouragement—"In your new place, beauty? Then behave yourself as well here as at Munich—I see you!" Next he posts himself deliberately before the unfinished *Pietà*<sup>10</sup> for half an hour without moving, till up he starts of a sudden, and thrusts his very nose into—I say, into—the group; by which gesture you are informed that precisely the sole point he had not fully mastered in Canova's practice was a certain method of using the drill in the articulation of the knee-joint—and that, likewise, has he mastered at length! Good-bye, therefore, to poor Canova—whose gallery no longer needs detain his successor Jules, the predestinated novel thinker in marble!

*5th Student.* Tell him about the women: go on to the women!

*1st Student.* Why, on that matter he could never be supercilious enough. How should we be other (he said) than the poor devils you see, with those debasing habits we cherish? He was not to wallow in that mire, at least: he would wait, and love only at the proper time, and meanwhile put up with the *Psiche-fanciulla*. Now, I happened to hear of a young Greek—real Greek girl at Malamocco;<sup>11</sup> a true Islander, do you see, with Alciphron's<sup>12</sup> "hair like sea-moss"—Schramm knows!—white and quiet as an apparition, and fourteen years old at farthest,—a daughter of Natalia, so she swears—that hag Natalia, who helps us to models at three *lire*<sup>13</sup> an hour. We selected this girl for the heroine of our jest. So first, Jules received a scented letter—somebody had seen his Tydeus<sup>14</sup> at the Acad-

<sup>9</sup> *Psiche-fanciulla*: Canova's statue of Psyche as a young girl with a butterfly (in the gallery at Possagno).

<sup>10</sup> *Pietà*: a statue of Mary with the dead Christ in her arms.

<sup>11</sup> *Malamocco*: a small town and island near Venice.

<sup>12</sup> *Alciphron*: Greek writer of the second century A.D.

<sup>13</sup> *Lire*: plural of *lira*, Italian coin formerly worth about twenty cents.

<sup>14</sup> *Tydeus*: one of the heroes of the Theban War.

emy,<sup>15</sup> and my picture was nothing to it: a profound admirer bade him persevere—would make herself known to him ere long. (Paolina, my little friend of the *Fenice*,<sup>16</sup> transcribes divinely.) And in due time, the mysterious correspondent gave certain hints of her peculiar charms—the pale cheeks, the black hair—whatever, in short, had struck us in our Malamocco model: we retained her name, too—Phene, which is, by interpretation, sea-eagle. Now, think of Jules finding himself distinguished from the herd of us by such a creature! In his very first answer he proposed marrying his monitress: and fancy us over these letters, two, three times a day, to receive and despatch! I concocted the main of it: relations were in the way—secrecy must be observed—in fine, would he wed her on trust, and only speak to her when they were indissolubly united? St—st—Here they come!

*6th Student.* Both of them! Heaven's love, speak softly, speak within yourselves!

*5th Student.* Look at the bridegroom! Half his hair in storm and half in calm,—patted down over the left temple,—like a frothy cup one blows on to cool it: and the same old blouse that he murders the marble in.

*2nd Student.* Not a rich vest like yours, Hannibal Scratchy!<sup>17</sup>—rich, that your face may the better set it off.

*6th Student.* And the bride! Yes, sure enough, our Phene! Should you have known her in her clothes? How magnificently pale!

*Gottlieb.* She does not also take it for earnest, I hope?

*1st Student.* Oh, Natalia's concern, that is! We settle with Natalia.

*6th Student.* She does not speak—has evidently let out no word. The only thing is, will she equally remember the rest of her lesson, and repeat correctly all those verses which are to break the secret to Jules?

*Gottlieb.* How he gazes on her! Pity—pity!

<sup>15</sup> *Academy*: of Fine Arts in Venice.

<sup>16</sup> *The Fenice*: the Phoenix, a theatre in Venice.

<sup>17</sup> *Hannibal Scratchy*: burlesque for Annibale Caracci (Italian painter).

*1st Student.* They go in: now, silence! You three,—not nearer the window, mind, than that pomegranate: just where the little girl, who a few minutes ago passed us singing, is seated!

## PART II

## NOON

SCENE.—*Over Orcana. The house of JULES, who crosses its threshold with PHENE: she is silent, on which JULES begins—*

Do not die, Phene! I am yours now, you  
 Are mine now; let fate reach me how she likes,  
 If you'll not die: so, never die! Sit here—  
 My work-room's single seat. I over-lean  
 This length of hair and lustrous front; they turn 5  
 Like an entire flower upward: eyes, lips, last  
 Your chin—no, last your throat turns: 't is their scent  
 Pulls down my face upon you. Nay, look ever  
 This one way till I change, grow you—I could  
 Change into you, beloved!

You by me, 10

And I by you; this is your hand in mine,  
 And side by side we sit: all's true. Thank God!  
 I have spoken: speak you!

O my life to come!

My Tydeus must be carved that's there in clay;  
 Yet how be carved, with you about the room? 15  
 Where must I place you? When I think that once  
 This room-full of rough block-work seemed my heaven  
 Without you! Shall I ever work again,  
 Get fairly into my old ways again,  
 Bid each conception stand while, trait by trait, 20  
 My hand transfers its lineaments to stone?  
 Will my mere fancies live near you, their truth—  
 The live truth, passing and repassing me,  
 Sitting beside me?

Now speak!

Only first,

See, all your letters! Was 't not well contrived? 25

Their hiding-place is Psyche's robe; she keeps  
 Your letters next her skin: which drops out foremost?  
 Ah,—this that swam down like a first moonbeam  
 Into my world!

Again those eyes complete  
 Their melancholy survey, sweet and slow, 30  
 Of all my room holds; to return and rest  
 On me, with pity, yet some wonder too:  
 As if God bade some spirit plague a world,  
 And this were the one moment of surprise  
 And sorrow while she took her station, pausing 35  
 O'er what she sees, finds good, and must destroy!  
 What gaze you at? Those? Books, I told you of;  
 Let your first word to me rejoice them, too:  
 This minion, a Coluthus, writ in red  
 Bistre and azure by Bessarion's scribe— 40  
 Read this line . . . no, shame—Homer's be the Greek  
 First breathed me from the lips of my Greek girl!  
 This Odyssey in coarse black vivid type  
 With faded yellow blossoms 'twixt page and page,  
 To mark great places with due gratitude; 45  
*"He said, and on Antinous directed*  
*A bitter shaft"* . . . a flower blots out the rest!  
 Again upon your search? My statues, then!  
 —Ah, do not mind that—better that will look  
 When cast in bronze—an Almain Kaiser, that, 50  
 Swart-green and gold, with truncheon based on hip.  
 This, rather, turn to! What, unrecognized?  
 I thought you would have seen that here you sit  
 As I imagined you,—Hippolyta,  
 Naked upon her bright Numidian horse. 55  
 Recall you this then? "Carve in bold relief"—  
 So you commanded—"carve, against I come,

39–40. Coluthus was a Greek poet of the sixth century; Cardinal Bessarion in the fifteenth century discovered one of his poems. *Bistre*: a dark brown paint made from the soot of wood.

46–7. Antinous was one of the suitors of Penelope. He was killed by Odysseus. Notice the appropriateness of this reference to vengeance, in the light of what Jules says later.

50. *Almain*: German.

54. *Hippolyta*: Queen of the Amazons, conquered and forced to marry Theseus.

A Greek, in Athens, as our fashion was,  
 Feasting, bay-filleted and thunder-free,  
 Who rises 'neath the lifted myrtle-branch. 60  
 'Praise those who slew Hipparchus!' cry the guests,  
 'While o'er thy head the singer's myrtle waves  
 As erst above our champion: stand up, all!' "  
 See, I have laboured to express your thought.  
 Quite round, a cluster of mere hands and arms, 65  
 (Thrust in all senses, all ways, from all sides,  
 Only consenting at the branch's end  
 They strain toward) serves for frame to a sole face,  
 The Praiser's, in the centre: who with eyes  
 Sightless, so bend they back to light inside 70  
 His brain where visionary forms throng up,  
 Sings, minding not that palpitating arch  
 Of hands and arms, nor the quick drip of wine  
 From the drenched leaves o'erhead, nor crowns cast off,  
 Violet and parsley crowns to trample on— 75  
 Sings, pausing as the patron-ghosts approve,  
 Devoutly their unconquerable hymn.  
 But you must say a "well" to that—say "well!"  
 Because you gaze—am I fantastic, sweet?  
 Gaze like my very life's-stuff, marble—marbly 80  
 Even to the silence! Why, before I found  
 The real flesh Phene, I inured myself  
 To see, throughout all nature, varied stuff  
 For better nature's birth by means of art:  
 With me, each substance tended to one form 85  
 Of beauty—to the human archetype.  
 On every side occurred suggestive germs  
 Of that—the tree, the flower—or take the fruit,—  
 Some rosy shape, continuing the peach,  
 Curved beewise o'er its bough; as rosy limbs, 90  
 Depending, nestled in the leaves; and just  
 From a cleft rose-peach the whole Dryad sprang.

59. *Bay-filleted*: crowned by bay (laurel) leaves, supposed to be a protection against lightning.

60-61. Hipparchus, Athenian tyrant, was killed by conspirators who concealed their daggers in myrtle-branches carried at a festival.

75. *Crowns*: of garlands (worn especially at drinking bouts).

92. *Dryad*: a nymph that lives in a tree.

But of the stuffs one can be master of,  
 How I divined their capabilities!  
 From the soft-rinded smoothening facile chalk 95  
 That yields your outline to the air's embrace,  
 Half-softened by a halo's pearly gloom;  
 Down to the crisp imperious steel, so sure  
 To cut its one confided thought clean out  
 Of all the world. But marble!—'neath my tools 100  
 More pliable than jelly—as it were  
 Some clear primordial creature dug from depths  
 In the earth's heart, where itself breeds itself,  
 And whence all baser substance may be worked;  
 Refine it off to air, you may,—condense it 105  
 Down to the diamond;—is not metal there,  
 When o'er the sudden speck my chisel trips?  
 —Not flesh, as flake off flake I scale, approach,  
 Lay bare those bluish veins of blood asleep?  
 Lurks flame in no strange windings where, surprised 110  
 By the swift implement sent home at once,  
 Flushes and glowings radiate and hover  
 About its track?  
                                 Phene? what—why is this?  
 That whitening cheek, those still dilating eyes!  
 Ah, you will die—I knew that you would die! 115

*PHENE begins, on his having long remained silent.*

Now the end's coming; to be sure, it must  
 Have ended sometime! Tush, why need I speak  
 Their foolish speech? I cannot bring to mind  
 One half of it, beside; and do not care  
 For old Natalia now, nor any of them. 120  
 Oh, you—what are you?—if I do not try  
 To say the words Natalia made me learn,  
 To please your friends,—it is to keep myself  
 Where your voice lifted me, by letting that  
 Proceed: but can it? Even you, perhaps, 125

113 ff. Even in this "drama" notice how undramatic are Jules' and Phene's speeches considered as dialogue. Each speech is really a *dramatic monologue*. Browning is turning instinctively to the form that he was later to develop and make his own.



Cannot take up, now you have once let fall,  
 The music's life, and me along with that—  
 No, or you would! We'll stay, then, as we are:  
 Above the world.

You creature with the eyes!

If I could look for ever up to them, 130  
 As now you let me,—I believe, all sin,  
 All memory of wrong done, suffering borne,  
 Would drop down, low and lower, to the earth  
 Whence all that's low comes, and there touch and stay  
 —Never to overtake the rest of me, 135  
 All that, unspotted, reaches up to you,  
 Drawn by those eyes! What rises is myself,  
 Not me the shame and suffering; but they sink,  
 Are left, I rise above them. Keep me so,  
 Above the world!

But you sink, for your eyes 140  
 Are altering—altered! Stay—"I love you, love" . . .  
 I could prevent it if I understood:  
 More of your words to me: was 't in the tone  
 Or the words, your power?

Or stay—I will repeat

Their speech, if that contents you! Only change 145  
 No more, and I shall find it presently  
 Far back here, in the brain yourself filled up.  
 Natalia threatened me that harm should follow  
 Unless I spoke their lesson to the end,  
 But harm to me, I thought she meant, not you. 150  
 Your friends,—Natalia said they were your friends  
 And meant you well,—because, I doubted it,  
 Observing (what was very strange to see)  
 On every face, so different in all else,  
 The same smile girls like me are used to bear, 155  
 But never men, men cannot stoop so low;  
 Yet your friends, speaking of you, used that smile,  
 That hateful smirk of boundless self-conceit  
 Which seems to take possession of the world  
 And make of God a tame confederate, 160  
 Purveyor to their appetites . . . you know!  
 But still Natalia said they were your friends,  
 And they assented though they smiled the more,

And all came round me,—that thin Englishman  
 With light lank hair seemed leader of the rest; 165  
 He held a paper—"What we want," said he,  
 Ending some explanation to his friends—  
 "Is something slow, involved and mystical,  
 To hold Jules long in doubt, yet take his taste  
 And lure him on until, at innermost 170  
 Where he seeks sweetness' soul, he may find—this!  
 —As in the apple's core, the noisome fly:  
 For insects on the rind are seen at once,  
 And brushed aside as soon, but this is found  
 Only when on the lips or loathing tongue." 175  
 And so he read what I have got by heart:  
 I'll speak it,—“Do not die, love! I am yours.”  
 No—is not that, or like that, part of words  
 Yourself began by speaking? Strange to lose  
 What cost such pains to learn! Is this more right? 180

*I am a painter who cannot paint;  
 In my life, a devil rather than saint;  
 In my brain, as poor a creature too:  
 No end to all I cannot do!  
 Yet do one thing at least I can— 185  
 Love a man or hate a man  
 Supremely: thus my lore began.  
 Through the Valley of Love I went,  
 In the lovingest spot to abide,  
 And just on the verge where I pitched my tent, 190  
 I found Hate dwelling beside.  
 (Let the Bridegroom ask what the painter meant,  
 Of his Bride, of the peerless Bride!)  
 And further, I traversed Hate's grove,  
 In the hatefullest nook to dwell; 195  
 But lo, where I flung myself prone, couched Love  
 Where the shadow threefold fell.  
 (The meaning—those black bride's-eyes above,  
 Not a painter's lip should tell!)*

“And here,” said he, “Jules probably will ask,  
 ‘You have black eyes, Love,—you are, sure enough,  
 My peerless bride,—then do you tell indeed 200

What needs some explanation! What means this?" "  
—And I am to go on, without a word—

*So, I grew wise in Love and Hate,* 205  
*From simple that I was of late.*  
*Once, when I loved, I would enlase*  
*Breast, eyelids, hands, feet, form and face*  
*Of her I loved, in one embrace—*  
*As if by mere love I could love immensely!* 210  
*Once, when I hated, I would plunge*  
*My sword, and wipe with the first lunge*  
*My foe's whole life out like a sponge—*  
*As if by mere hate I could hate intensely!*  
*But now I am wiser, know better the fashion* 215  
*How passion seeks aid from its opposite passion:*  
*And if I see cause to love more, hate more*  
*Than ever man loved, ever hated before—*  
*And seek in the Valley of Love*  
*The nest, or the nook in Hate's Grove* 220  
*Where my soul may surely reach*  
*The essence, naught less, of each,*  
*The Hate of all Hates, the Love*  
*Of all Loves, in the Valley or Grove,—*  
*I find them the very warders* 225  
*Each of the other's borders.*  
*When I love most, Love is disguised*  
*In Hate; and when Hate is surprised*  
*In Love, then I hate most: ask*  
*How Love smiles through Hate's iron casque,* 230  
*Hate grins through Love's rose-braided mask,—*  
*And how, having hated thee,*  
*I sought long and painfully*  
*To reach thy heart, nor prick*  
*The skin but pierce to the quick—* 235  
*Ask this, my Jules, and be answered straight*  
*By thy bride—how the painter Lutwyche can hate!*

JULES interposes.

Lutwyche! Who else? But all of them, no doubt,  
Hated me: they at Venice—presently

Their turn, however! You I shall not meet: 240  
If I dreamed, saying this would wake me.

Keep

What's here, the gold—we cannot meet again,  
Consider! and the money was but meant  
For two years' travel, which is over now,  
All chance or hope or care or need of it. 245  
This—and what comes from selling these, my casts  
And books and medals, except . . . let them go  
Together, so the produce keeps you safe  
Out of Natalia's clutches! If by chance  
(For all's chance here) I should survive the gang 250  
At Venice, root out all fifteen of them,  
We might meet somewhere, since the world is wide.

[*From without is heard the voice of PIPPA, singing—*

*Give her but a least excuse to love me!*  
*When—where—*  
*How—can this arm establish her above me,* 255  
*If fortune fixed her as my lady there,*  
*There already, to eternally reprove me?*  
*("Hist!"—said Kate the Queen;*  
*But "Oh!"—cried the maiden, binding her tresses,*  
*"'T is only a page that carols unseen,* 260  
*Crumbling your hounds their messes!")*

*Is she wronged?—To the rescue of her honour,*  
*My heart!*  
*Is she poor?—What costs it to be styled a donor?*  
*Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part.* 265  
*But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her!*  
*("Nay, list!"—bade Kate the Queen;*  
*And still cried the maiden, binding her tresses,*  
*"'T is only a page that carols unseen,*  
*Fitting your hawks their jesses!")* 270

[*PIPPA passes.*

258. *Kate the Queen*: Caterina Cornaro (c. 1454–1510), Venetian, Queen of Cyprus. Venice forced her to abdicate and assigned her as a dwelling the castle at Asolo. The most celebrated member of her court was Pietro Bembo, whose dialogue on Platonic love, the *Asolani*, derives its name from that region. The dedication of Browning's own *Asolando* refers to the Queen and her secretary Bembo.

*JULES resumes.*

What name was that the little girl sang forth?  
 Kate? The Cornaro, doubtless, who renounced  
 The crown of Cyprus to be lady here  
 At Asolo, where still her memory stays,  
 And peasants sing how once a certain page 275  
 Pined for the grace of her so far above  
 His power of doing good to, "Kate the Queen—  
 She never could be wronged, be poor," he sighed,  
 "Need him to help her!"

Yes, a bitter thing  
 To see our lady above all need of us; 280  
 Yet so we look ere we will love; not I,  
 But the world looks so. If whoever loves  
 Must be, in some sort, god or worshipper,  
 The blessing or the blest one, queen or page,  
 Why should we always choose the page's part? 285  
 Here is a woman with utter need of me,—  
 I find myself queen here, it seems!

How strangel  
 Look at the woman here with the new soul,  
 Like my own Psyche,—fresh upon her lips  
 Alit, the visionary butterfly, 290  
 Waiting my word to enter and make bright,  
 Or flutter off and leave all blank as first.  
 This body had no soul before, but slept  
 Or stirred, was beauteous or ungainly, free  
 From taint or foul with stain, as outward things 295  
 Fastened their image on its passiveness:  
 Now, it will wake, feel, live—or die again!  
 Shall to produce form out of unshaped stuff  
 Be Art—and further, to evoke a soul  
 From form be nothing? This new soul is mine! 300  
 Now, to kill Lutwyche, what would that do?—save  
 A wretched dauber, men will hoot to death  
 Without me, from their hooting. Oh, to hear  
 God's voice plain as I heard it first, before  
 They broke in with their laughter! I heard them 305  
 Henceforth, not God.

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272. Cf. note to l. 258.

To Ancona—Greece—some isle!

I wanted silence only; there is clay  
 Everywhere. One may do whate'er one likes  
 In Art: the only thing is, to make sure  
 That one does like it—which takes pains to know. 310  
 Scatter all this, my Phene—this mad dream!  
 Who, what is Lutwyche, what Natalia's friends,  
 What the whole world except our love—my own,  
 Own Phene? But I told you, did I not,  
 Ere night we travel for your land—some isle 315  
 With the sea's silence on it? Stand aside—  
 I do but break these paltry models up  
 To begin Art afresh. Meet Lutwyche, I—  
 And save him from my statue meeting him?  
 Some unsuspected isle in the far seas! 320  
 Like a god going through his world, there stands  
 One mountain for a moment in the dusk,  
 Whole brotherhoods of cedars on its brow:  
 And you are ever by me while I gaze  
 —Are in my arms as now—as now—as now! 325  
 Some unsuspected isle in the far seas!  
 Some unsuspected isle in far-off seas!

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*Talk by the way, while PIPPA is passing from Orcana to the Turret. Two or three of the Austrian Police loitering with BLUPHOCKS,<sup>1</sup> an English vagabond, just in view of the Turret.*

*Bluphocks.\** So, that is your Pippa, the little girl who passed us singing? Well, your Bishop's Intendant's<sup>2</sup> money shall be honestly earned:—now, don't make me that sour face because I bring the Bishop's name into the business; we know he can have nothing to do with such horrors: we know that he is a saint and all that a bishop should be, who is a great man beside.

---

306. *Ancona*: town on the east coast of Italy.

<sup>1</sup> *Bluphocks*: "Blue Fox," perhaps in reference to the *Edinburgh Review*, bound in a cover of blue and fox.

\* "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" [Browning].

<sup>2</sup> *Intendant*: superintendent (of the Bishop's estates).

*Oh were every worm a maggot, Every fly a grig,<sup>3</sup> Every bough a Christmas faggot, Every tune a jig!* In fact, I have abjured all religions; but the last I inclined to, was the Armenian: for I have travelled, do you see, and at Koenigsberg, Prussia Improper<sup>4</sup> (so styled because there's a sort of bleak hungry sun there), you might remark over a venerable house-porch, a certain Chaldee<sup>5</sup> inscription; and brief as it is, a mere glance at is used absolutely to change the mood of every bearded passenger. In they turned, one and all; the young and light-some, with no irreverent pause, the aged and decrepit, with a sensible alacrity: 't was the Grand Rabbi's abode, in short. Struck with curiosity, I lost no time in learning Syriac—(these are vowels, you dogs,—follow my stick's end in the mud—*Celarent, Darii, Ferio!*)<sup>6</sup> and one morning presented myself, spelling-book in hand, a, b, c,—I picked it out letter by letter, and what was the purport of this miraculous posy?<sup>7</sup> Some cherished legend of the past, you'll say—“*How Moses hocus-pocussed Egypt's land with fly and locust,*”—or, “*How to Jonah sounded harshish, Get thee up and go to Tarshish,*”—or “*How the angel meeting Balaam, Straight his ass returned a salaam.*” In no wise! “*Shackabrack—Boach—somebody or other—Isaach, Re-cei-ver, Pur-cha-ser and Ex-chan-ger of—Stolen Goods!*” So, talk to me of the religion of a bishop! I have renounced all bishops save Bishop Beveridge<sup>8</sup>—mean to live so—and die—*As some Greek dog-sage, dead and merry, Hellward bound in Charon's wherry,*<sup>9</sup> *With food for both worlds, under and upper, Lupine-seed*<sup>10</sup> *and Hecate's supper,*<sup>11</sup> *And never an obolus . . .* (Though thanks to you, or this Intendant

<sup>3</sup> *Grig*: grasshopper or cricket.

<sup>4</sup> *Prussia Improper*: as distinguished from Prussia proper.

<sup>5</sup> *Chaldee*: a Semitic language.

<sup>6</sup> *Celarent, Darii, Ferio*: words coined to aid the memory in the study of Logic.

<sup>7</sup> *Posy*: “poesy,” i.e., a rhyme or motto.

<sup>8</sup> *Beveridge*: pun on beverage.

<sup>9</sup> *Wherry*: light boat. The dead were ferried across the Styx by Charon for a fee of an *obolus*, a small Athenian coin.

<sup>10</sup> *Lupine-seed*: an edible seed.

<sup>11</sup> *Hecate's supper*: the food to propitiate the goddess of the underworld.

through you, or this Bishop through his Intendant—I possess a burning pocketfull of *zwanzigers*)<sup>12</sup> . . . *To pay the Stygian Ferry!*

*1st Policeman.* There is the girl, then; go and deserve them the moment you have pointed out to us Signor Luigi and his mother. [*To the rest.*] I have been noticing a house yonder, this long while: not a shutter unclosed since morning!

*2nd Policeman.* Old Luca Gaddi's, that owns the silk-mills here: he dozes by the hour, wakes up, sighs deeply, says he should like to be Prince Metternich, and then dozes again, after having bidden young Sebald, the foreigner, set his wife to playing draughts. Never molest such a household, they mean well.

*Bluphocks.* Only, cannot you tell me something of this little Pippa, I must have to do with? One could make something of that name. Pippa—that is, short for Felippa—rhyming to *Panurge*<sup>13</sup> *consults Hertrippa—Believest thou, King Agrippa?*<sup>14</sup> Something might be done with that name.

*2nd Policeman.* Put into rhyme that your head and a ripe musk-melon would not be dear at half a *zwanziger*! Leave this fooling, and look out; the afternoon's over or nearly so.

*3rd Policeman.* Where in this passport of Signor Luigi does our Principal instruct you to watch him so narrowly? There? What's there beside a simple signature? (That English fool's busy watching.)

*2nd Policeman.* Flourish all round—"Put all possible obstacles in his way;" oblong dot at the end—"Detain him till further advices reach you;" scratch at bottom—"Send him back on pretence of some informality in the above;" ink-spirt on right-

<sup>12</sup> *Zwanziger*: twenty-kreuzer coin (Austrian).

Notice that Browning's prose, like some of his poetry, may be obscure on first reading because the thoughts are not arranged logically or chronologically with every step based on what has already been made clear, but instead are spoken naturally as they come to mind. All the necessary links in the chain are there, but in confused order. A second reading usually makes a speech such as this one much clearer.

<sup>13</sup> *Panurge consults Hertrippa*: concerning his marriage, in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.

<sup>14</sup> A question put by Paul (Acts, xxvi, 27). Bluphock's references to Rabelais and to prophecy hint at his plan to entrap Pippa into a vicious life.



hand side (which is the case here)—“Arrest him at once.” Why and wherefore, I don’t concern myself, but my instructions amount to this: if Signor Luigi leaves home to-night for Vienna—well and good, the passport deposed with us for our *visa* is really for his own use, they have misinformed the Office, and he means well; but let him stay over to-night—there has been the pretence we suspect, the accounts of his corresponding and holding intelligence with the Carbonari<sup>15</sup> are correct, we arrest him at once, to-morrow comes Venice, and presently Spielberg.<sup>16</sup> Bluphocks makes the signal, sure enough! That is he, entering the turret with his mother, no doubt.

## PART III

## EVENING

SCENE.—*Inside the Turret on the Hill above Asolo. LUIGI and his Mother entering.*

*Mother.* If there blew wind, you’d hear a long sigh, easing  
The utmost heaviness of music’s heart.

*Luigi.* Here in the archway?

*Mother.* Oh no, no—in farther,  
Where the echo is made, on the ridge.

*Luigi.* Here surely, then.  
How plain the tap of my heel as I leaped up! 5  
Hark—“Lucius Junius!” The very ghost of a voice  
Whose body is caught and kept by . . . what are those?  
Mere withered wallflowers, waving overhead?  
They seem an elvish group with thin bleached hair  
That lean out of their topmost fortress—look 10  
And listen, mountain men, to what we say,  
Hand under chin of each grave earthy face.  
Up and show faces all of you!—“All of you!”  
That’s the king dwarf with the scarlet comb; old Franz,

<sup>15</sup> *Carbonari*: secret patriotic society conspiring to liberate Italy from Austria.

<sup>16</sup> *Spielberg*: an Austrian prison.

6. Lucius Junius Brutus led the revolt against the Tarquins which established the Roman republic.

Come down and meet your fate? Hark—"Meet your fate!" 15

*Mother.* Let him not meet it, my Luigi—do not  
Go to his City! Putting crime aside,  
Half of these ills of Italy are feigned:  
Your Pellicos and writers for effect,  
Write for effect.

*Luigi.* Hush! Say A. writes, and B. 20

*Mother.* These A.s and B.s write for effect, I say.  
Then, evil is in its nature loud, while good  
Is silent; you hear each petty injury,  
None of his virtues; he is old beside,  
Quiet and kind, and densely stupid. Why 25  
Do A. and B. not kill him themselves?

*Luigi.* They teach  
Others to kill him—me—and, if I fail,  
Others to succeed; now, if A. tried and failed,  
I could not teach that: mine's the lesser task.  
Mother, they visit night by night . . .

*Mother.* You, Luigi? 30  
Ah, will you let me tell you what you are?

*Luigi.* Why not? Oh, the one thing you fear to hint,  
You may assure yourself I say and say  
Ever to myself! At times—nay, even as now  
We sit—I think my mind is touched, suspect 35  
All is not sound: but is not knowing that,  
What constitutes one sane or otherwise?  
I know I am thus—so, all is right again.  
I laugh at myself as through the town I walk,  
And see men merry as if no Italy 40  
Were suffering; then I ponder—"I am rich,  
Young, healthy; why should this fact trouble me,  
More than it troubles these?" But it does trouble.  
No, trouble's a bad word: for as I walk  
There's springing and melody and giddiness, 45  
And old quaint turns and passages of my youth,  
Dreams long forgotten, little in themselves,  
Return to me—whatever may amuse me:  
And earth seems in a truce with me, and heaven

14. *Old Franz*: Francis I, Emperor of Austria.

19. Silvio Pellico, Italian patriot and member of the Carbonari, was imprisoned in Spielberg Castle.

Accords with me, all things suspend their strife, 50  
 The very cicala laughs "There goes he, and there!  
 Feast him, the time is short; he is on his way  
 For the world's sake: feast him this once, our friend!"  
 And in return for all this, I can trip  
 Cheerfully up the scaffold-steps. I go 55  
 This evening, mother!

*Mother.* But mistrust yourself—  
 Mistrust the judgment you pronounce on him!

*Luigi.* Oh, there I feel—am sure that I am right!

*Mother.* Mistrust your judgment then, of the mere means 60  
 To this wild enterprise. Say, you are right,—  
 How should one in your state e'er bring to pass  
 What would require a cool head, a cold heart,  
 And a calm hand? You never will escape.

*Luigi.* Escape? To even wish that, would spoil all. 65  
 The dying is best part of it. Too much  
 Have I enjoyed these fifteen years of mine,  
 To leave myself excuse for longer life:  
 Was not life pressed down, running o'er with joy,  
 That I might finish with it ere my fellows  
 Who, sparerlier feasted, make a longer stay? 70  
 I was put at the board-head, helped to all  
 At first; I rise up happy and content.  
 God must be glad one loves his world so much.

I can give news of earth to all the dead  
 Who ask me:—last year's sunsets, and great stars 75  
 Which had a right to come first and see ebb  
 The crimson wave that drifts the sun away—  
 Those crescent moons with notched and burning rims  
 That strengthened into sharp fire, and there stood,  
 Impatient of the azure—and that day 80  
 In March, a double rainbow stopped the storm—  
 May's warm slow yellow moonlit summer nights—  
 Gone are they, but I have them in my soul!

*Mother.* (He will not go!)

*Luigi.* You smile at me? 'T is true,— 85  
 Voluptuousness, grotesqueness, ghastliness,  
 Environ my devotedness as quaintly  
 As round about some antique altar wreath  
 The rose festoons, goats' horns, and oxen's skulls.

*Mother.* See now: you reach the city, you must cross  
His threshold—how?

*Luigi.* Oh, that's if we conspired! 90  
Then would come pains in plenty, as you guess—  
But guess not how the qualities most fit  
For such an office, qualities I have,  
Would little stead me, otherwise employed,  
Yet prove of rarest merit only here. 95  
Every one knows for what his excellence  
Will serve, but no one ever will consider  
For what his worst defect might serve: and yet  
Have you not seen me range our coppice yonder  
In search of a distorted ash?—I find 100  
The wry spoilt branch a natural perfect bow.  
Fancy the thrice-sage, thrice-precautioned man  
Arriving at the palace on my errand!  
No, no! I have a handsome dress packed up—  
White satin here, to set off my black hair; 105  
In I shall march—for you may watch your life out  
Behind thick walls, make friends there to betray you;  
More than one man spoils everything. March straight—  
Only, no clumsy knife to fumble for,  
Take the great gate, and walk (not saunter) on 110  
Thro' guards and guards—I have rehearsed it all  
Inside the turret here a hundred times.  
Don't ask the way of whom you meet, observe!  
But where they cluster thickest is the door  
Of doors; they'll let you pass—they'll never blab 115  
Each to the other, he knows not the favourite,  
Whence he is bound and what's his business now.  
Walk in—straight up to him; you have no knife:  
Be prompt, how should he scream? Then, out with you!  
Italy, Italy, my Italy! 120  
You're free, you're free! Oh mother, I could dream  
They got about me—Andrea from his exile,  
Pier from his dungeon, Gualtier from his grave!  
*Mother.* Well, you shall go. Yet seems this patriotism  
The easiest virtue for a selfish man 125  
To acquire: he loves himself—and next, the world—  
If he must love beyond,—but naught between:

As a short-sighted man sees naught midway  
 His body and the sun above. But you  
 Are my adored Luigi, ever obedient 130  
 To my least wish, and running o'er with love:  
 I could not call you cruel or unkind.

Once more, your ground for killing him!—then go!  
*Luigi.* Now do you try me, or make sport of me?  
 How first the Austrians got these provinces . . . 135  
 (If that is all, I'll satisfy you soon)  
 —Never by conquest but by cunning, for  
 That treaty whereby . . .

*Mother.* Well?

*Luigi.* (Sure, he's arrived,  
 The tell-tale cuckoo: spring's his confidant,  
 And he lets out her April purposes!) 140  
 Or . . . better go at once to modern time,  
 He has . . . they have . . . in fact, I understand  
 But can't restate the matter; that's my boast:  
 Others could reason it out to you, and prove  
 Things they have made me feel.

*Mother.* Why go to-night? 145  
 Morn's for adventure. Jupiter is now  
 A morning-star. I cannot hear you, Luigi!

*Luigi.* "I am the bright and morning-star," saith God—  
 And, "to such an one I give the morning-star."  
 The gift of the morning-star! Have I God's gift 150  
 Of the morning-star?

*Mother.* Chiara will love to see  
 That Jupiter an evening-star next June.  
*Luigi.* True, mother. Well for those who live through June!  
 Great noontides, thunder-storms, all glaring pomps  
 That triumph at the heels of June the god 155  
 Leading his revel through our leafy world.  
 Yes, Chiara will be here.

*Mother.* In June: remember,  
 Yourself appointed that month for her coming.

*Luigi.* Was that low noise the echo?

*Mother.* The night-wind.  
 She must be grown—with her blue eyes upturned 160

135. *These provinces:* of Northern Italy, given to Austria by the Congress of Vienna, 1815.

As if life were one long and sweet surprise:  
In June she comes.

*Luigi.* We were to see together  
The Titian at Treviso. There, again!

[*From without is heard the voice of PIPPA, singing—*

*A king lived long ago,  
In the morning of the world,* 165  
*When earth was nigher heaven than now:  
And the king's locks curled,  
Disparting o'er a forehead full  
As the milk-white space 'twixt horn and horn  
Of some sacrificial bull—* 170  
*Only calm as a babe new-born:  
For he was got to a sleepy mood,  
So safe from all decrepitude,  
Age with its bane, so sure gone by,  
(The gods so loved him while he dreamed)* 175  
*That, having lived thus long, there seemed  
No need the king should ever die.*

*Luigi.* No need that sort of king should ever die!

*Among the rocks his city was:  
Before his palace, in the sun,* 180  
*He sat to see his people pass,  
And judge them every one  
From its threshold of smooth stone.  
They haled him many a valley-thief  
Caught in the sheep-pens, robber-chief* 185  
*Swarthy and shameless, beggar-cheat,  
Spy-prowler, or rough pirate found  
On the sea-sand left aground;  
And sometimes clung about his feet,  
With bleeding lip and burning cheek,* 190

163. An altar-piece by Titian is in the Annunziata chapel of the cathedral at Treviso.

164-222. This song in a different form had been printed in the *Monthly Repository* for November, 1835. Therefore it was doubtless not written to characterize Pippa, who now sings it. It is impossible to draw a sharp distinction between the voice of Browning and the voices of his characters.

*A woman, bitterest wrong to speak  
 Of one with sullen thickset brows:  
 And sometimes from the prison-house  
 The angry priests a pale wretch brought,  
 Who through some chink had pushed and pressed 195  
 On knees and elbows, belly and breast,  
 Worm-like into the temple,—caught  
 He was by the very god,  
 Who ever in the darkness strode  
 Backward and forward, keeping watch 200  
 O'er his brazen bowls, such rogues to catch!  
 These, all and every one,  
 The king judged, sitting in the sun.*

*Luigi.* That king should still judge sitting in the sun!

*His counsellors, on left and right, 205  
 Looked anxious up,—but no surprise  
 Disturbed the king's old smiling eyes  
 Where the very blue had turned to white.  
 'T is said, a Python scared one day  
 The breathless city, till he came, 210  
 With forked tongue and eyes on flame,  
 Where the old king sat to judge alway;  
 But when he saw the sweepy hair  
 Girt with a crown of berries rare  
 Which the god will hardly give to wear 215  
 To the maiden who singeth, dancing bare  
 In the altar-smoke by the pine-torch lights,  
 At his wondrous forest rites,—  
 Seeing this, he did not dare  
 Approach that threshold in the sun, 220  
 Assault the old king smiling there.  
 Such grace had kings when the world begun!*

[PIPPA passes.]

*Luigi.* And such grace have they, now that the world ends!  
 The Python at the city, on the throne,  
 And brave men, God would crown for slaying him, 225  
 Lurk in bye-corners lest they fall his prey.  
 Are crowns yet to be won in this late time,

Which weakness makes me hesitate to reach?  
'T is God's voice calls: how could I stay? Farewell!

*Talk by the way, while PIPPA is passing from the Turret to the Bishop's Brother's House, close to the Duomo S. Maria. Poor Girls sitting on the steps.*

1st Girl.           There goes a swallow to Venice—the stout  
                          seafarer! 230

Seeing those birds fly, makes one wish for wings.  
Let us all wish; you wish first!

2nd Girl.                               I? This sunset  
To finish.

3rd Girl.       That old—somebody I know,  
Greyer and older than my grandfather,  
To give me the same treat he gave last week— 235

Feeding me on his knee with fig-peckers,  
Lampreys and red Breganze-wine, and mumbling  
The while some folly about how well I fare,  
Let sit and eat my supper quietly:  
Since had he not himself been late this morning 240  
Detained at—never mind where,—had he not . . .  
“Eh, baggage, had I not!”—

2nd Girl.                               How she can lie!

3rd Girl.       Look there—by the nails!

2nd Girl.                               What makes your fingers red?

3rd Girl.       Dipping them into wine to write bad words with  
On the bright table: how he laughed!

1st Girl.   My turn. 245  
Spring's come and summer's coming. I would wear  
A long loose gown, down to the feet and hands,  
With plaits here, close about the throat, all day;  
And all night lie, the cool long nights, in bed;  
And have new milk to drink, apples to eat, 250  
Deuzans and junetings, leather-coats . . . ah, I should say,  
This is away in the fields—miles!

3rd Girl.   Say at once  
You'd be at home: she'd always be at home!

236. *Fig-peckers*: small birds.

237. *Lampreys*: eel-like fish.

251. *Deuzans, junetings, leather-coats*: varieties of apples.



Now comes the story of the farm among  
 The cherry orchards, and how April snowed 255  
 White blossoms on her as she ran. Why, fool,  
 They've rubbed the chalk-mark out, how tall you were  
 Twisted your starling's neck, broken his cage,  
 Made a dung-hill of your garden!

*1st Girl.* They, destroy  
 My garden since I left them? well—perhaps 260  
 I would have done so: so I hope they have!  
 A fig-tree curled out of our cottage wall;  
 They called it mine, I have forgotten why,  
 It must have been there long ere I was born:  
*Cric—cric*—I think I hear the wasps o'erhead 265  
 Pricking the papers strung to flutter there  
 And keep off birds in fruit-time—coarse long papers,  
 And the wasps eat them, prick them through and through.

*3rd Girl.* How her mouth twitches! Where was I?—before  
 She broke in with her wishes and long gowns 270  
 And wasps—would I be such a fool!—Oh, here!  
 This is my way: I answer every one  
 Who asks me why I make so much of him—  
 (If you say, "you love him"—straight "he'll not be gulled!")  
 "He that seduced me when I was a girl 275  
 Thus high—had eyes like yours, or hair like yours,  
 Brown, red, white,"—as the case may be: that pleases!  
 See how that beetle burnishes in the path!  
 There sparkles he along the dust: and, there—  
 Your journey to that maize-tuft spoiled at least! 280

*1st Girl.* When I was young, they said if you killed one  
 Of those sunshiny beetles, that his friend  
 Up there, would shine no more that day nor next.

*2nd Girl.* When you were young? Nor are you young,  
 that's true.  
 How your plump arms, that were, have dropped away! 285  
 Why, I can span them. Cecco beats you still?  
 No matter, so you keep your curious hair.  
 I wish they'd find a way to dye our hair  
 Your colour—any lighter tint, indeed,  
 Than black: the men say they are sick of black, 290  
 Black eyes, black hair!

*4th Girl.* Sick of yours, like enough.  
Do you pretend you ever tasted lampreys  
And ortolans? Giovita, of the palace,  
Engaged (but there's no trusting him) to slice me  
Polenta with a knife that had cut up  
An ortolan. 295

*2nd Girl.* Why, there! Is not that Pippa  
We are to talk to, under the window,—quick,—  
Where the lights are?

*1st Girl.* That she? No, or she would sing,  
For the Intendant said . . .

*3rd Girl.* Oh, you sing first!  
Then, if she listens and comes close . . . I'll tell you,— 300  
Sing that song the young English noble made,  
Who took you for the purest of the pure,  
And meant to leave the world for you—what fun!

*2nd Girl [sings].*

*You'll love me yet!—and I can tarry  
Your love's protracted growing: 305  
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,  
From seeds of April's sowing.*

*I plant a heartfelt now: some seed  
At least is sure to strike,  
And yield—what you'll not pluck indeed, 310  
Not love, but, may be, like.*

*You'll look at least on love's remains,  
A grave's one violet:  
Your look?—that pays a thousand pains.  
What's death? You'll love me yet! 315*

*3rd Girl [to PIPPA who approaches].* Oh, you may come  
closer—we shall not eat you! Why, you seem the very person  
that the great rich handsome Englishman has fallen so violently  
in love with. I'll tell you all about it.

293. *Ortolans*: birds, considered a great delicacy.

295. *Polenta*: pudding made of corn meal.

## PART IV

## NIGHT

SCENE.—*Inside the Palace by the Duomo.* MONSIGNOR, *dismissing his Attendants.*

*Monsignor.* Thanks, friends, many thanks! I chiefly desire life now, that I may recompense every one of you. Most I know something of already. What, a repast prepared? *Benedicto benedicatur*<sup>1</sup> . . . ugh, ugh! Where was I? Oh, as you were remarking, Ugo, the weather is mild, very unlike winter-weather: but I am a Sicilian, you know, and shiver in your Julys here. To be sure, when 't was full summer at Messina,<sup>2</sup> as we priests used to cross in procession the great square on Assumption Day, you might see our thickest yellow tapers twist suddenly in two, each like a falling star, or sink down on themselves in a gore of wax. But go, my friends, but go! [*To the Intendant.*] Not you, Ugo! [*The others leave the apartment.*] I have long wanted to converse with you, Ugo.

*Intendant.* Uguccio—

*Monsignor.* . . . 'guccio Stefani, man! of Ascoli, Fermo and Fossombruno;—what I do need instructing about, are these accounts of your administration of my poor brother's affairs. Ugh! I shall never get through a third part of your accounts: take some of these dainties before we attempt it, however. Are you bashful to that degree? For me, a crust and water suffice.

*Intendant.* Do you choose this especial night to question me?

*Monsignor.* This night, Ugo. You have managed my late brother's affairs since the death of our elder brother: fourteen years and a month, all but three days. On the Third of December, I find him . . .

*Intendant.* If you have so intimate an acquaintance with

<sup>1</sup> *Benedicto benedicatur*: a blessing.

<sup>2</sup> *Messina*: seaport in Sicily.

your brother's affairs, you will be tender of turning so far back: they will hardly bear looking into, so far back.

*Monsignor.* Ay, ay, ugh, ugh,—nothing but disappointments here below! I remark a considerable payment made to yourself on this Third of December. Talk of disappointments! There was a young fellow here, Jules, a foreign sculptor I did my utmost to advance, that the Church might be a gainer by us both: he was going on hopefully enough, and of a sudden he notifies to me some marvellous change that has happened in his notions of Art. Here's his letter,—“He never had a clearly conceived Ideal within his brain till to-day. Yet since his hand could manage a chisel, he has practised expressing other men's Ideals; and, in the very perfection he has attained to, he foresees an ultimate failure: his unconscious hand will pursue its prescribed course of old years, and will reproduce with a fatal expertness the ancient types, let the novel one appear never so palpably to his spirit. There is but one method of escape: confiding the virgin type to as chaste a hand, he will turn painter instead of sculptor, and paint, not carve, its characteristics,”—strike out, I dare say, a school like Correggio: how think you, Ugo?

*Intendant.* Is Correggio a painter?

*Monsignor.* Foolish Jules! and yet, after all, why foolish? He may—probably will—fail egregiously; but if there should arise a new painter, will it not be in some such way, by a poet now, or a musician (spirits who have conceived and perfected an Ideal through some other channel), transferring it to this, and escaping our conventional roads by pure ignorance of them; eh, Ugo? If you have no appetite, talk at least, Ugo!

*Intendant.* Sir, I can submit no longer to this course of yours. First, you select the group of which I formed one,—next you thin it gradually,—always retaining me with your smile,—and so do you proceed till you have fairly got me alone with you between four stone walls. And now then? Let this farce, this chatter end now: what is it you want with me?

*Monsignor.* Ugo!

*Intendant.* From the instant you arrived, I felt your smile

on me as you questioned me about this and the other article in those papers—why your brother should have given me this villa, that *podere*,<sup>3</sup>—and your nod at the end meant,—what?

*Monsignor.* Possibly that I wished for no loud talk here. If once you set me coughing, Ugo!—

*Intendant.* I have your brother's hand and seal to all I possess: now ask me what for! what service I did him—ask me!

*Monsignor.* I would better not: I should rip up old disgraces, let out my poor brother's weaknesses. By the way, Maffeo of Forli (which, I forgot to observe, is your true name), was the interdict ever taken off you, for robbing that church at Cesena?

*Intendant.* No, nor needs be: for when I murdered your brother's friend, Pasquale, for him . . .

*Monsignor.* Ah, he employed you in that business, did he? Well, I must let you keep, as you say, this villa and that *podere*, for fear the world should find out my relations were of so indifferent a stamp? Maffeo, my family is the oldest in Messina, and century after century have my progenitors gone on polluting themselves with every wickedness under heaven: my own father . . . rest his soul!—I have, I know, a chapel to support that it may rest: my dear two dead brothers were,—what you know tolerably well; I, the youngest, might have rivalled them in vice, if not in wealth: but from my boyhood I came out from among them, and so am not partaker of their plagues. My glory springs from another source; or if from this, by contrast only,—for I, the bishop, am the brother of your employers, Ugo. I hope to repair some of their wrong, however; so far as my brother's ill-gotten treasure reverts to me, I can stop the consequences of his crime: and not one *soldo*<sup>4</sup> shall escape me. Maffeo, the sword we quiet men spurn away, you shrewd knaves pick up and commit murders with; what opportunities the virtuous forego, the villanous seize. Because, to pleasure myself apart from other considerations, my food would be millet-cake, my dress sackcloth, and my couch straw,—am I therefore to let you, the offscouring

<sup>3</sup> *Podere*: farm.

<sup>4</sup> *Soldo*: Italian penny.

of the earth, seduce the poor and ignorant by appropriating a pomp these will be sure to think lessens the abominations so unaccountably and exclusively associated with it? Must I let villas and *poderi* go to you, a murderer and thief, that you may beget by means of them other murderers and thieves? No—if my cough would but allow me to speak!

*Intendant.* What am I to expect? You are going to punish me?

*Monsignor.* Must punish you, Maffeo. I cannot afford to cast away a chance. I have whole centuries of sin to redeem, and only a month or two of life to do it in. How should I dare to say . . .

*Intendant.* "Forgive us our trespasses"?

*Monsignor.* My friend, it is because I avow myself a very worm, sinful beyond measure, that I reject a line of conduct you would applaud perhaps. Shall I proceed, as it were, a-pardoning?—I?—who have no symptom of reason to assume that aught less than my strenuousest efforts will keep myself out of mortal sin, much less keep others out. No: I do trespass, but will not double that by allowing you to trespass.

*Intendant.* And suppose the villas are not your brother's to give, nor yours to take? Oh, you are hasty enough just now!

*Monsignor.* 1, 2—No. 3!—ay, can you read the substance of a letter, No. 3, I have received from Rome? It is precisely on the ground there mentioned, of the suspicion I have that a certain child of my late elder brother, who would have succeeded to his estates, was murdered in infancy by you, Maffeo, at the instigation of my late younger brother—that the Pontiff enjoins on me not merely the bringing that Maffeo to condign punishment, but the taking all pains, as guardian of the infant's heritage for the Church, to recover it parcel by parcel, howsoever, whensoever, and wheresoever. While you are now gnawing those fingers, the police are engaged in sealing up your papers, Maffeo, and the mere raising my voice brings my people from the next room to dispose of yourself. But I want you to confess quietly, and save me raising my voice. Why, man, do I not know the old story? The heir between the

succeeding heir, and this heir's ruffianly instrument, and their complot's effect, and the life of fear and bribes and ominous smiling silence? Did you throttle or stab my brother's infant? Come now!

*Intendant.* So old a story, and tell it no better? When did such an instrument ever produce such an effect? Either the child smiles in his face; or, most likely, he is not fool enough to put himself in the employer's power so thoroughly: the child is always ready to produce—as you say—howsoever, where-soever, and whensoever.

*Monsignor.* Liar!

*Intendant.* Strike me? Ah, so might a father chastise! I shall sleep soundly to-night at least, though the gallows await me to-morrow; for what a life did I lead! Carlo of Cesena reminds me of his connivance, every time I pay his annuity; which happens commonly thrice a year. If I remonstrate, he will confess all to the good bishop—you!

*Monsignor.* I see through the trick, caitiff! I would you spoke truth for once. All shall be sifted, however—seven times sifted.

*Intendant.* And how my absurd riches encumbered me! I dared not lay claim to above half my possessions. Let me but once unbosom myself, glorify Heaven, and die!

Sir, you are no brutal dastardly idiot like your brother I frightened to death: let us understand one another. Sir, I will make away with her for you—the girl—here close at hand; not the stupid obvious kind of killing; do not speak—know nothing of her nor of me! I see her every day—saw her this morning: of course there is to be no killing; but at Rome the courtesans perish off every three years, and I can entice her thither—have indeed begun operations already. There's a certain lusty blue-eyed florid-complexioned English knave, I and the Police employ occasionally. You assent, I perceive—no, that's not it—assent I do not say—but you will let me convert my present havings and holdings into cash, and give me time to cross the Alps? 'T is but a little black-eyed pretty singing Felippa, gay silk-winding girl. I have kept her out

of harm's way up to this present; for I always intended to make your life a plague to you with her. 'T is as well settled once and for ever. Some women I have procured will pass Bluphocks, my handsome scoundrel, off for somebody; and once Pippa entangled!—you conceive? Through her singing? Is it a bargain?

[*From without is heard the voice of PIPPA, singing—*

Overhead the tree-tops meet,  
Flowers and grass spring 'neath one's feet;  
There was naught above me, naught below,  
My childhood had not learned to know:  
For, what are the voices of birds 5  
—Ay, and of beasts,—but words, our words,  
Only so much more sweet?  
The knowledge of that with my life begun.  
But I had so near made out the sun,  
And counted your stars, the seven and one, 10  
Like the fingers of my hand:  
Nay, I could all but understand  
Wherefore through heaven the white moon ranges;  
And just when out of her soft fifty changes  
No unfamiliar face might overlook me— 15  
Suddenly God took me.

[*PIPPA passes.*

Monsignor [*springing up*]. My people—one and all—all—within there! Gag this villain—tie him hand and foot! He dares . . . I know not half he dares—but remove him—quick! *Miserere mei, Domine!* Quick, I say! 20

SCENE.—*PIPPA's chamber again. She enters it.*

The bee with his comb,  
The mouse at her dray,  
The grub in his tomb,

10. *Seven and one*: the seven Pleiades and one other star, probably Aldebaran, "the follower" of one of the Pleiades.

20. *Miserere mei, Domine*: "Be merciful to me, O Lord!"

22. *Dray*: nest.



Wile winter away;  
 But the fire-fly and hedge-shrew and lob-worm, I pray,      25  
 How fare they?  
 Ha, ha, thanks for your counsel, my Zanze!  
 "Feast upon lampreys, quaff Breganze"—  
 The summer of life so easy to spend,  
 And care for to-morrow so soon put away!      30  
 But winter hastens at summer's end,  
 And fire-fly, hedge-shrew, lob-worm, pray,  
 How fare they?  
 No bidding me then to . . . what did Zanze say?  
 "Pare your nails pearlwise, get your small feet shoes      35  
 More like" . . . (what said she?)—"and less like canoes!"  
 How pert that girl was!—would I be those pert  
 Impudent staring women! It had done me,  
 However, surely no such mighty hurt  
 To learn his name who passed that jest upon me:      40  
 No foreigner, that I can recollect,  
 Came, as she says, a month since, to inspect  
 Our silk-mills—none with blue eyes and thick rings  
 Of raw-silk-coloured hair, at all events.  
 Well, if old Luca keep his good intents,      45  
 We shall do better, see what next year brings.  
 I may buy shoes, my Zanze, not appear  
 More destitute than you perhaps next year!  
 Bluph . . . something! I had caught the uncouth name  
 But for Monsignor's people's sudden clatter      50  
 Above us—bound to spoil such idle chatter  
 As ours: it were indeed a serious matter  
 If silly talk like ours should put to shame  
 The pious man, the man devoid of blame,  
 The . . . ah but—ah but, all the same,      55  
 No mere mortal has a right  
 To carry that exalted air;  
 Best people are not angels quite:  
 While—not the worst of people's doings scare  
 The devil; so there's that proud look to spare!      60  
 Which is mere counsel to myself, mind! for  
 I have just been the holy Monsignor:

25. *Hedge-shrew*: field-mouse; *lob-worm*: a marine worm.

And I was you too, Luigi's gentle mother,  
 And you too, Luigi!—how that Luigi started  
 Out of the turret—doubtlessly departed 65  
 On some good errand or another,  
 For he passed just now in a traveller's trim,  
 And the sullen company that prowled  
 About his path, I noticed, scowled  
 As if they had lost a prey in him. 70  
 And I was Jules the sculptor's bride,  
 And I was Ottima beside,  
 And now what am I?—tired of fooling.  
 Day for folly, night for schooling!  
 New year's day is over and spent, 75  
 Ill or well, I must be content.

Even my lily's asleep, I vow:  
 Wake up—here's a friend I've plucked you:  
 Call this flower a heart's-case now!  
 Something rare, let me instruct you, 80  
 Is this, with petals triply swollen,  
 Three times spotted, thrice the pollen;  
 While the leaves and parts that witness  
 Old proportions and their fitness,  
 Here remain unchanged, unmoved now; 85  
 Call this pampered thing improved now!  
 Suppose there's a king of the flowers  
 And a girl-show held in his bowers—  
 "Look ye, buds, this growth of ours,"  
 Says he, "Zanze from the Brenta, 90  
 I have made her gorge polenta  
 Till both cheeks are near as bouncing  
 As her . . . name there's no pronouncing!  
 See this heightened colour too,  
 For she swilled Breganze wine 95  
 Till her nose turned deep carmine;  
 'T was but white when wild she grew.  
 And only by this Zanze's eyes  
 Of which we could not change the size,  
 The magnitude of all achieved 100  
 Otherwise, may be perceived."

67. *Trim*: dress.

90. *Brenta*: river in Italy.

Oh what a drear dark close to my poor day!  
 How could that red sun drop in that black cloud?  
 Ah Pippa, morning's rule is moved away,  
 Dispensed with, never more to be allowed! 105  
 Day's turn is over, now arrives the night's.

Oh lark, be day's apostle  
 To mavis, merle and throstle,  
 Bid them their betters jostle  
 From day and its delights! 110

But at night, brother howlet, over the woods,  
 Toll the world to thy chantry;  
 Sing to the bats' sleek sisterhoods  
 Full complines with gallantry:  
 Then, owls and bats, 115

Cowls and twats,  
 Monks and nuns, in a cloister's moods,  
 Adjourn to the oak-stump pantry!  
*[After she has begun to undress herself.]*

Now, one thing I should like to really know:  
 How near I ever might approach all these 120  
 I only fancied being, this long day:

—Approach, I mean, so as to touch them, so  
 As to . . . in some way . . . move them—if you please,  
 Do good or evil to them some slight way.  
 For instance, if I wind 125  
 Silk to-morrow, my silk may bind

*[Sitting on the bedside.]*

And border Ottima's cloak's hem.  
 Ah me, and my important part with them,  
 This morning's hymn half promised when I rose!  
 True in some sense or other, I suppose. 130

*[As she lies down.]*

God bless me! I can pray no more to-night.  
 No doubt, some way or other, hymns say right.

*All service ranks the same with God—  
 With God, whose puppets, best and worst,  
 Are we: there is no last nor first. 135*

*[She sleeps.]*

108. *Mavis, throstle*: thrushes; *merle*: blackbird.

111. *Howlet*: owl.

114. *Complines*: last ecclesiastical office of the day.

## SHORTER POEMS



## CAVALIER TUNES\*

### I. MARCHING ALONG

#### I

KENTISH Sir Byng stood for his King,  
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:  
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop  
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,  
Marched them along, fifty-score strong, 5  
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

#### II

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles  
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!  
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,  
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup 10  
Till you're—

CHORUS.—*Marching along, fifty-score strong,  
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.*

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\* For his play *Strafford* (1837) Browning had recently been studying the period of the Civil Wars (1642–1651) in which the Royalists or Cavaliers were defeated by the Parliamentarians. "Cavalier Tunes," intended to mark the second centenary of the outbreak, were published in 1842 as the first of the *Dramatic Lyrics*. These lyrics are dramatic, and do not express Browning's own political position, since *Strafford* and the *Parleying with Charles Avison* show that he was on the side of liberalism in the seventeenth century as well as in the nineteenth. But Browning's love of color and dashing action was so much deeper than his political sympathies that these Cavalier lyrics have more vitality than his poems of liberal politics. Notice that one is a military march, the second a drinking song, the third an expression of confidence in his wife by the one who is riding away.

2. The Parliamentarians or Puritans were called Roundheads because they cropped their hair short, while the Cavaliers wore long flowing locks. This middle-class fashion of the rebels has since triumphed, like the *sans-culotte* (trousers, as opposed to knee breeches) of the French Revolutionaries.

3. *Pressing*: conscripting for military service.

7. John Pym (1584–1643), leader of the Parliamentary party, who helped impeach *Strafford*. *Carles*: churls.

## III

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell  
 Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!  
 England, good cheer! Rupert is near! 15  
 Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here

CHORUS.—*Marching along, fifty-score strong,  
 Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song?*

## IV

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls  
 To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles! 20  
 Hold by the right, you double your might;  
 So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

CHORUS.—*March we along, fifty-score strong,  
 Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!*

## II. GIVE A ROUSE

## I

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?  
 King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?  
 Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,  
 King Charles!

## II

Who gave me the goods that went since? 5  
 Who raised me the house that sank once?  
 Who helped me to gold I spent since?  
 Who found me in wine you drank once?

13. John Hampden (1594-1643) opposed the King's right to exact ship-money, and died fighting against Prince Rupert.

14. Sir Arthur Hazelrig, one of the five Parliamentarians who moved the Bill of Attainder against Strafford. Nathaniel Fiennes, a Presbyterian, friend of Cromwell. Sir Henry Vane, the younger, leader of the Parliamentary Party.

15. Prince Rupert of Bavaria, nephew of King Charles, became a Cavalier leader.

16. *Keep we not here:* do we not keep marching along?

22. *Nottingham:* where the Cavaliers made a stand against the Parliamentarians in August, 1642.

II. *Rouse:* cheer while drinking.

8. *Found:* provided.

CHORUS.—*King Charles, and you'll do him right now?  
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?* 10  
*Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,  
King Charles!*

## III

To whom used my boy George quaff else,  
By the old fool's side that begot him?  
For whom did he cheer and laugh else, 15  
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?  
CHORUS.—*King Charles, and who'll do him right now?  
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?  
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,  
King Charles!* 20

## III. BOOT AND SADDLE

## I

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!  
Rescue my castle before the hot day  
Brightens to blue from its silvery gray,  
CHORUS.—*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*

## II

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say; 5  
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray  
"God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay—  
CHORUS.—*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

## III

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,  
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array: 10

16. *Noll's damned troopers*: Oliver Cromwell's Ironsides. Lafcadio Hearn says, "the measure in the third stanza does not run smoothly like the measure of the other stanzas; it hesitates a little. But it is a great stroke of art, for it indicates the suppressed emotion of the father speaking of his dead son" (*Appreciations of Poetry*, 212).

III. "Boot and Saddle." This lyric was first published under the title "My Wife Gertrude." The Cavalier leaves his castle in the hands of his wife as he goes to Nottingham. Compare Hotspur and his wife Lady Percy in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*, especially II, iii, and III, i.

10. *Castle Brancepeth*: in North England, near Durham.



Who laughs, "Good fellows ere this, by my fay,  
 CHORUS.—*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

## IV

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,  
 Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!  
 I've better counsellors; what counsel they?"

15

CHORUS.—*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

## MY LAST DUCHESS\*

## FERRARA

THAT's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
 Looking as if she were alive. I call  
 That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands  
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
 Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said  
 "Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read  
 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not  
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot  
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps  
 Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps  
 Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint  
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint

5

10

15

\* Entitled "Italy" when it first appeared in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), this and the poem later called "Count Gismond" were grouped together under the general heading "Italy and France." Browning has given concentrated expression to the Italian Renaissance—morally and esthetically—in these fifty-six lines. He was also contrasting Italy and France in their attitude towards marriage: The Italian duke looks upon his wife as his property, over whom he exercises the power of life and death. Compare the Duchess and her husband in "The Flight of the Duchess."

*Ferrara*: town in northern Italy, ruled in the Renaissance by dukes of the Este family, who were noted for their accomplishments and their cruelty.

3. *Frà Pandolf*: a painter who was a *frà* or brother in a monastic order (fictitious character).

16-17. Her wrist is so beautiful that it should not be concealed.

Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff  
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough 20  
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had  
 A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,  
 Too easily impressed: she liked whate'er  
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.  
 Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast, 25  
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,  
 The bough of cherries some officious fool *ch. - a friend*  
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule *competitors*  
 She rode with round the terrace—all and each  
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech, 30  
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked  
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked  
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name *ch. self-esteem*  
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill 35  
 In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will *ch. He at*  
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this  
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss, *have to be*  
 Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let *expand to*  
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set 40  
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,  
 —E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose *ch. pride*  
 Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands; *ch. Power*  
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands 45  
 As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet *ch. /*  
 The company below, then. I repeat, *po*  
 The Count your master's known munificence  
 Is ample warrant that no just pretence 50  
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go *Dy. front*

45-6. Browning, questioned as to the meaning of these lines, said, "the commands were that she should be put to death . . . or he might have had her shut up in a convent" (Corson, *Introduction to . . . Browning*, note to third ed. p. viii). The "as if" of the following line shows that she has met death, even if her husband's method of accomplishing it was indirect.

53-4. Compare the last line of Act I in *Hamlet*, "Nay, come, let's go

62 <sup>false</sup>  
*cameraderie: negation of then class differences.*  
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,  
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!  
*But soon proved false*

55

## COUNT GISMOND\*

### AIX IN PROVENCE

#### I

CHRIST God who savest man, save most  
 Of men Count Gismond who saved me!  
 Count Gauthier, when he chose his post,  
 Chose time and place and company  
 To suit it; when he struck at length  
 My honour, 't was with all his strength.

5

#### II

And doubtlessly ere he could draw  
 All points to one, he must have schemed!  
 That miserable morning saw  
 Few half so happy as I seemed,  
 While being dressed in queen's array  
 To give our tourney prize away.

10

#### III

I thought they loved me, did me grace  
 To please themselves; 't was all their deed;  
 God makes, or fair or foul, our face;  
 If showing mine so caused to bleed

15

together," expressing a similar graciousness on the part of a Renaissance prince. But what the Duke takes for recognition of difference in rank is doubtless a feeling of aversion.

56. *Claus of Innsbruck*: like Frà Pandolf, an imaginary character. The studied indifference of the conclusion brings out how sensitive is the Duke's esthetic taste, and how callous his conscience.

\* Published in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) as "II. France" under the general title "Italy and France," this poem attempts to catch the spirit of Medieval France as the companion poem ("My Last Duchess") caught the spirit of Renaissance Italy (especially with reference to typical attitudes towards women). The incident is imaginary, but Arthur Symonds says, "the mediaeval temper of entire confidence in the ordeal by duel has never been better rendered." The poem was very popular among the Pre-Raphaelite poets.

My cousins' hearts, they should have dropped  
A word, and straight the play had stopped.

## IV

They, too, so beauteous! Each a queen  
By virtue of her brow and breast; 20  
Not needing to be crowned, I mean,  
As I do. E'en when I was dressed,  
Had either of them spoke, instead  
Of glancing sideways with still head!

## V

But no; they let me laugh, and sing 25  
My birthday song quite through, adjust  
The last rose in my garland, fling  
A last look on the mirror, trust  
My arms to each an arm of theirs,  
And so descend the castle-stairs— 30

## VI

And come out on the morning-troop  
Of merry friends who kissed my cheek,  
And called me queen, and made me stoop  
Under the canopy—(a streak  
That pierced it, of the outside sun, 35  
Powdered with gold it's gloom's soft dun)—

## VII

And they could let me take my state  
And foolish throne amid applause  
Of all come there to celebrate  
My queen's-day—Oh I think the cause 40  
Of much was, they forgot no crowd  
Makes up for parents in their shroud!

## VIII

Howe'er that be, all eyes were bent  
Upon me, when my cousins cast  
Theirs down; 't was time I should present 45  
The victor's crown, but . . . there, 't will last  
No long time . . . the old mist again  
Blinds me as then it did. How vain!

## IX

See! Gismond 's at the gate, in talk  
 With his two boys: I can proceed. 50  
 Well, at that moment, who should stalk  
 Forth boldly—to my face, indeed—  
 But Gauthier, and he thundered "Stay!"  
 And all stayed. "Bring no crowns, I say!"

## X

"Bring torches! Wind the penance-sheet 55  
 About her! Let her shun the chaste,  
 Or lay herself before their feet!  
 Shall she whose body I embraced  
 A night long, queen it in the day?  
 For honour's sake no crowns, I say!" 60

## XI

I? What I answered? As I live,  
 I never fancied such a thing  
 As answer possible to give.  
 What says the body when they spring  
 Some monstrous torture-engine's whole 65  
 Strength on it? No more says the soul.

## XII

Till out strode Gismond; then I knew  
 That I was saved. I never met  
 His face before, but, at first view,  
 I felt quite sure that God had set 70  
 Himself to Satan; who would spend  
 A minute's mistrust on the end?

## XIII

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat  
 Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth  
 With one back-handed blow that wrote 75  
 In blood men's verdict there. North, South,  
 East, West, I looked. The lie was dead,  
 And damned, and truth stood up instead.

## XIV

This glads me most, that I enjoyed  
The heart of the joy, with my content 80  
In watching Gismond unalloyed  
By any doubt of the event:  
God took that on him—I was bid  
Watch Gismond for my part: I did.

## XV

Did I not watch him while he let 85  
His armourer just brace his greaves,  
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret  
The while! His foot . . . my memory leaves  
No least stamp out, nor how anon  
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on. 90

## XVI

And e'en before the trumpet's sound  
Was finished, prone lay the false knight,  
Prone as his lie, upon the ground:  
Gismond flew at him, used no sleight  
O' the sword, but open-breasted drove, 95  
Cleaving till out the truth he clove.

## XVII

Which done, he dragged him to my feet  
And said "Here die, but end thy breath  
In full confession, lest thou fleet  
From my first, to God's second death! 100  
Say, hast thou lied?" And, "I have lied  
To God and her," he said, and died.

## XVIII

Then Gismond, kneeling to me, asked  
—What safe my heart holds, though no word  
Could I repeat now, if I tasked 105  
My powers for ever, to a third  
Dear even as you are. Pass the rest  
Until I sank upon his breast.

## XIX

Over my head his arm he flung  
 Against the world; and scarce I felt 110  
 His sword (that dripped by me and swung)  
 A little shifted in its belt:  
 For he began to say the while  
 How South our home lay many a mile.

## XX

So 'mid the shouting multitude 115  
 We two walked forth to never more  
 Return. My cousins have pursued  
 Their life, untroubled as before  
 I vexed them. Gauthier's dwelling-place  
 God lighten! May his soul find grace! 120

## XXI

Our elder boy has got the clear  
 Great brow; tho' when his brother's black  
 Full eye shows scorn, it . . . Gismond here?  
 And have you brought my tercel back?  
 I just was telling Adela 125  
 How many birds it struck since May.

## INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP\*

## I

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:  
 A mile or so away,  
 On a little mound, Napoleon  
 Stood on our storming-day;  
 With neck out-thrust, you fancy how, 5  
 Legs wide, arms locked behind,  
 As if to balance the prone brow  
 Oppressive with its mind.

---

124. *Tercel*: a falcon.

\* This appeared originally (in *Dramatic Lyrics*, 1842) as "Camp (French)" along with "Cloister (Spanish)" ("Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister") under the general title "Camp and Cloister." The poems are thus supposed to be doubly typical. They seem to say that aggressive war brings out the best in men, monastic life the worst.

1. *Ratisbon*: Bavarian city of Regensburg on the Danube, stormed by Napoleon in April, 1809.

## II

Just as perhaps he mused "My plans  
 That soar, to earth may fall,  
 Let once my army-leader Lannes  
 Waver at yonder wall,"—  
 Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew  
 A rider, bound on bound  
 Full-galloping; nor bridle drew  
 Until he reached the mound.

## III

Then off there flung in smiling joy,  
 And held himself erect  
 By just his horse's mane, a boy:  
 You hardly could suspect—  
 (So tight he kept his lips compressed,  
 Scarce any blood came through)  
 You looked twice ere you saw his breast  
 Was all but shot in two.

## IV

"Well," cried he, "Emperor, by God's grace  
 We've got you Ratisbon!  
 The Marshal's in the market-place,  
 And you'll be there anon  
 To see your flag-bird flap his vans  
 Where I, to heart's desire,  
 Perched him!" The chief's eye flashed; his plans  
 Soared up again like fire.

## V

The chief's eye flashed; but presently  
 Softened itself, as sheathes  
 A film the mother-eagle's eye  
 When her bruised eaglet breathes;  
 "You're wounded!" "Nay," the soldier's pride  
 Touched to the quick, he said:  
 "I'm killed, Sire!" And his chief beside  
 Smiling the boy fell dead.

11. *Lannes*: Duke of Montebello, Napoleon's general in charge of the assault.



## SOLILOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER\*

## I

GR-R-R—there go, my heart's abhorrence!  
 Water your damned flower-pots, do!  
 If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,  
 God's blood, would not mine kill you!  
 What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming? 5  
 Oh, that rose has prior claims—  
 Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?  
 Hell dry you up with its flames!

## II

At the meal we sit together:  
*Salve tibi* I must hear 10  
 Wise talk of the kind of weather,  
 Sort of season, time of year:  
*Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely*  
*Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:*  
*What 's the Latin name for "parsley"?* 15  
 What 's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

## III

Whew! We 'll have our platter burnished,  
 Laid with care on our own shelf!  
 With a fire-new spoon we 're furnished,  
 And a goblet for ourself, 20

---

\* This expression of hatred was first called "Cloister (Spanish)" and grouped with the "Incident of the French Camp" as the second of "Camp and Cloister" in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). The monk who speaks is the sort of man described in Erasmus' *Colloquies* ("Ichthyophagia"): "Nay, I myself have known a great many, that would sooner die than be persuaded to take the Sacrament after they had chanced to taste a bit of food, or let a drop of water go down their throat while they were washing their mouths; and yet the same persons will own, that they have so much malice against some, that, if they had an opportunity they would kill them; nor are they afraid with this temper of mind to approach the Lord's Table." See Matthew, xxiii, 23 ff. and Isaiah, i, 1-17 for Biblical condemnation of those who place external observances before mercy and justice. (Perhaps Brother Lawrence *is* something of a vapid bore.) In Browning's psychology the repression of natural instincts might be expected to lead to such manifestations—compare Freud's theories.

10. *Salve tibi*: hail to thee.

Rinsed like something sacrificial  
 Ere 't is fit to touch our chaps—  
 Marked with L. for our initial!  
 (He-he! There his lily snaps!)

## IV

*Saint*, forsooth! While brown Dolores 25  
 Squats outside the Convent bank  
 With Sanchicha, telling stories,  
 Steeping tresses in the tank,  
 Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,  
 —Can't I see his dead eye glow, 30  
 Bright as 't were a Barbary corsair's?  
 (That is, if he 'd let it show!)

## V

When he finishes refection,  
 Knife and fork he never lays  
 Cross-wise, to my recollection, 35  
 As do I, in Jesu's praise.  
 I the Trinity illustrate,  
 Drinking watered orange-pulp—  
 In three sips the Arian frustrate;  
 While he drains his at one gulp. 40

## VI

Oh, those melons? If he 's able  
 We 're to have a feast! so nice!  
 One goes to the Abbot's table,  
 All of us get each a slice.  
 How go on your flowers? None double? 45  
 Not one fruit-sort can you spy?  
 Strange!—And I, too, at such trouble,  
 Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

31. *Barbary corsair*: pirate from northern Africa.

35. To make a cross.

39. *Arian*: follower of Arius, heretic of the fourth century, who rejected orthodox Trinitarianism and held that the Son was created by but inferior to the Father.

## VII

There 's a great text in Galatians,  
 Once you trip on it, entails 50  
 Twenty-nine distinct damnations,  
 One sure, if another fails:  
 If I trip him just a-dying,  
 Sure of heaven as sure as can be,  
 Spin him round and send him flying 55  
 Off to hell, a Manichee?

## VIII

Or, my scrofulous French novel  
 On grey paper with blunt type!  
 Simply glance at it, you grovel  
 Hand and foot in Belial's gripe: 60  
 If I double down its pages  
 At the woeful sixteenth print,  
 When he gathers his greengages,  
 Ope a sieve and slip it in 't?

## IX

Or, there 's Satan!—one might venture 65  
 Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave  
 Such a flaw in the indenture  
 As he 'd miss till, past retrieve,  
 Blasted lay that rose-acacia

49. Probably Galatians, iii, 10; or v, 19-21. These very passages, on which he hopes to trip his associate into erroneous doctrine, condemn the speaker's own hatred, envying, lasciviousness, *etc.*, and his reliance on legalities. Notice the irony of the poem.

56. *Manichee*: follower of the Manichaean heresy which asserted the eternal opposition of good (Light) and evil (Darkness) instead of the orthodox Christian doctrine that God (the Light) was "in the beginning" and created everything else. The Manichaeans held that man and certainly women were created by Satan. Somewhat like the Antinomians who followed Johannes Agricola (see Browning's poem on him), they believed that only through the activity of "the elect" can the Light be separated from Darkness. Like Marcion, their founder Mani rejected Judaism completely. One might "trip" into some of their views from reading Galatians.

We're so proud of! *Hy Zy, Hine . . .* 70  
 'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratiâ*  
*Ave, Virgol* Gr-r—you swine!

## IN A GONDOLA\*

*He sings.*

I SEND my heart up to thee, all my heart  
 In this my singing.  
 For the stars help me, and the sea bears part;  
 The very night is clinging  
 Closer to Venice' streets to leave one space 5  
 Above me, whence thy face  
 May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling-place.

*She speaks.*

Say after me, and try to say  
 My very words, as if each word  
 Came from you of your own accord, 10  
 In your own voice, in your own way:  
 "This woman's heart and soul and brain  
 Are mine as much as this gold chain  
 She bids me wear; which" (say again)  
 "I choose to make by cherishing 15  
 A precious thing, or choose to fling  
 Over the boat-side, ring by ring."  
 And yet once more say . . . no word more!

70. These meaningless words represent a growl of hatred, or perhaps echo the ringing of the vesper bell.

71-2. Latin for "Hail Virgin, full of grace." The irony of the whole poem reaches a climax at this utterly uncomprehending mention of the grace of God, which does not seem to have filled the speaker to the transformation of his baser nature.

\* The first stanza was written to illustrate a picture, *The Serenade*, by Maclise; "a divine Venetian work," Browning called it. He had not seen it, "but, from Forster's description, gave it to him, in his room, *impromptu*." When he did see it, he thought the Serenade "too jolly somewhat for the notion I got from Forster—and I took up the subject in my own way" (*Letters*, ed. Hood, p. 196). He went on with the poem to tell a story entirely his own. It was published in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), and revised before the edition of 1849.

Since words are only words. Give o'er!  
 Unless you call me, all the same, 20  
 Familiarly by my pet name,  
 Which if the Three should hear you call,  
 And me reply to, would proclaim  
 At once our secret to them all.  
 Ask of me, too, command me, blame— 25  
 Do, break down the partition-wall  
 'Twixt us, the daylight world beholds  
 Curtained in dusk and splendid folds!  
 What's left but—all of me to take?  
 I am the Three's: prevent them, slake 30  
 Your thirst! 'T is said, the Arab sage,  
 In practising with gems, can loose  
 Their subtle spirit in his cruce  
 And leave but ashes: so, sweet mage,  
 Leave them my ashes when thy use 35  
 Sucks out my soul, thy heritage!

*He sings.*

I

Past we glide, and past, and past!  
 What's that poor Agnese doing  
 Where they make the shutters fast?  
 Grey Zanobi's just a-wooing 40  
 To his couch the purchased bride:  
 Past we glide!

II

Past we glide, and past, and past!  
 Why's the Pucci Palace flaring  
 Like a beacon to the blast? 45  
 Guests by hundreds, not one caring  
 If the dear host's neck were wried:  
 Past we glide!

22. *Three*: Paul, Gian, and "Himself," the lady's husband.

33. *Cruce*: crucible.

37 ff. Compare these stanzas with the plan of having Pippa "pass."

47. *Wried*: wrung.

*She sings.*

## I

The moth's kiss, first!  
 Kiss me as if you made believe  
 You were not sure, this eve,  
 How my face, your flower, had pursed  
 Its petals up; so, here and there  
 You brush it, till I grow aware  
 Who wants me, and wide ope I burst.

50

55

## II

The bee's kiss, now!  
 Kiss me as if you entered gay  
 My heart at some noonday,  
 A bud that dares not disallow  
 The claim, so all is rendered up,  
 And passively its shattered cup  
 Over your head to sleep I bow.

60

*He sings.*

## I

What are we too?  
 I am a Jew,  
 And carry thee, farther than friends can pursue,  
 To a feast of our tribe;  
 Where they need thee to bribe  
 The devil that blasts them unless he imbibe  
 Thy . . . Scatter the vision for ever! And now,  
 As of old, I am I, thou art thou!

65

70

## II

Say again, what we are?  
 The sprite of a star,  
 I lure thee above where the destinies bar  
 My plumes their full play  
 Till a ruddier ray

75

49-62. Lafcadio Hearn calls this "the very best we have in what might be called the 'literature of kissing,'" and explains the meaning of these two stanzas for his Japanese audience in *Appreciation of Poetry* (ed. Erskine, p. 201).

Than my pale one announce there is withering away  
 Some . . . Scatter the vision for ever! And now,  
 As of old, I am I, thou art thou!

*He muses.*

Oh, which were best, to roam or rest?  
 The land's lap or the water's breast? 80  
 To sleep on yellow millet-sheaves,  
 Or swim in lucid shallows just  
 Eluding water-lily leaves,  
 An inch from Death's black fingers, thrust  
 To lock you, whom release he must; 85  
 Which life were best on Summer eves?

*He speaks, musing.*

Lie back; could thought of mine improve you?  
 From this shoulder let there spring  
 A wing; from this, another wing;  
 Wings, not legs and feet, shall move you! 90  
 Snow-white must they spring, to blend  
 With your flesh, but I intend  
 They shall deepen to the end,  
 Broader, into burning gold,  
 Till both wings crescent-wise enfold 95  
 Your perfect self, from 'neath your feet  
 To o'er your head, where, lo, they meet  
 As if a million sword-blades hurled  
 Defiance from you to the world!

Rescue me thou, the only real! 100  
 And scare away this mad ideal  
 That came, nor motions to depart!  
 Thanks! Now, stay ever as thou art!

*Still he muses.*

I

What if the Three should catch at last  
 Thy serenader? While there's cast 105

Paul's cloak about my head, and fast  
 Gian pinions me, Himself has passed  
 His stylet thro' my back; I reel;  
 And . . . is it thou I feel?

## II

They trail me, these three godless knaves, 110  
 Past every church that saints and saves,  
 Nor stop till, where the cold sea raves  
 By Lido's wet accursed graves,  
 They scoop mine, roll me to its brink,  
 And . . . on thy breast I sink! 115

*She replies, musing.*

Dip your arm o'er the boat-side, elbow-deep,  
 As I do: thus: were death so unlike sleep,  
 Caught this way? Death 's to fear from flame or steel,  
 Or poison doubtless; but from water—feel!

Go find the bottom! Would you stay me? There! 120  
 Now pluck a great blade of that ribbon-grass  
 To plait in where the foolish jewel was,  
 I flung away: since you have praised my hair,  
 'T is proper to be choice in what I wear.

*He speaks.*

Row home? must we row home? Too surely 125  
 Know I where its front 's demurely  
 Over the Giudecca piled;  
 Window just with window mating,  
 Door on door exactly waiting,  
 All's the set face of a child: 130  
 But behind it, where 's a trace  
 Of the staidness and reserve,  
 And formal lines without a curve,  
 In the same child's playing-face?

113. Ancient Jewish tombs are on the Lido, an island at Venice.

120. "Go find the bottom" is spoken to the jewel.

127. *Giudecca*: a canal in Venice.



No two windows look one way 135  
 O'er the small sea-water thread  
 Below them. Ah, the autumn day  
 I, passing, saw you overhead!  
 First, out a cloud of curtain blew,  
 Then a sweet cry, and last came you— 140  
 To catch your lory that must needs  
 Escape just then, of all times then,  
 To peck a tall plant's fleecy seeds,  
 And make me happiest of men.  
 I scarce could breathe to see you reach 145  
 So far back o'er the balcony  
 To catch him ere he climbed too high  
 Above you in the Smyrna peach  
 That quick the round smooth cord of gold,  
 This coiled hair on your head, unrolled, 150  
 Fell down you like a gorgeous snake  
 The Roman girls were wont, of old,  
 When Rome there was, for coolness' sake  
 To let lie curling o'er their bosoms.  
 Dear lory, may his beak retain 155  
 Ever its delicate rose stain  
 As if the wounded lotus-blossoms  
 Had marked their thief to know again!

Stay longer yet, for others' sake  
 Than mine! What should your chamber do? 160  
 —With all its rarities that ache  
 In silence while day lasts, but wake  
 At night-time and their life renew,  
 Suspended just to pleasure you  
 Who brought against their will together 165  
 These objects, and, while day lasts, weave  
 Around them such a magic tether  
 That dumb they look: your harp, believe,  
 With all the sensitive tight strings  
 Which dare not speak, now to itself 170  
 Breathes slumberously, as if some elf  
 Went in and out the chords, his wings

Make murmur wheresoe'er they graze,  
 As an angel may, between the maze  
 Of midnight palace-pillars, on 175  
 And on, to sow God's plagues, have gone  
 Through guilty glorious Babylon.  
 And while such murmurs flow, the nymph  
 Bends o'er the harp-top from her shell  
 As the dry limpet for the lymph 180  
 Come with a tune he knows so well.  
 And how your statues' hearts must swell!  
 And how your pictures must descend  
 To see each other, friend with friend!  
 Oh, could you take them by surprise, 185  
 You'd find Schidone's cager Duke  
 Doing the quaintest courtesies  
 To that prim Saint by Haste-thee-Luke!  
 And, deeper into her rock den,  
 Bold Castelfranco's Magdalen 190  
 You'd find retreated from the ken  
 Of that robed counsel-keeping Ser—  
 As if the Tizian thinks of her,  
 And is not, rather, gravely bent  
 On seeing for himself what toys 195  
 Are these, his progeny invent,  
 What litter now the board employs  
 Whereon he signed a document  
 That got him murdered! Each enjoys  
 Its night so well, you cannot break 200  
 The sport up, so indeed must make  
 More stay with me, for others' sake.

180. The limpet comes from his shell for the limpid water (lymph) when he can hear it.

186. *Schidone*: Bartolemeo Schedone (1560–1616). The four paintings mentioned here are probably imaginary.

188. *Haste-thee-Luke*: Luca-fa-presto, nickname of Luca Giordana (1632–1705), Neapolitan painter.

190. *Castelfranco*: the painter Giorgione, who came from Castelfranco (1478–1511).

192. *Ser*: Sir.

193. *Tizian*: Titian, the painter (1477–1576).

*She speaks.*

## I

To-morrow, if a harp-string, say,  
 Is used to tie the jasmine back  
 That overflows my room with sweets, 205  
 Contrive your Zorzi somehow meets  
 My Zanze! If the ribbon 's black,  
 The Three are watching: keep away!

## II

Your gondola—let Zorzi wreath  
 A mesh of water-weeds about 210  
 Its prow, as if he unaware  
 Had struck some quay or bridge-foot stair!  
 That I may throw a paper out  
 As you and he go underneath.

There's Zanze's vigilant taper; safe are we. 215  
 Only one minute more to-night with me?  
 Resume your past self of a month ago!  
 Be you the bashful gallant, I will be  
 The lady with the colder breast than snow.  
 Now bow you, as becomes, nor touch my hand 220  
 More than I touch yours when I step to land,  
 And say, "All thanks, Siora!"—

## Heart to heart

And lips to lips! Yet once more, ere we part,  
 Clasp me and make me thine, as mine thou art!

*[He is surprised, and stabbed.]*

It was ordained to be so, sweet!—and best 225  
 Comes now, beneath thine eyes, upon thy breast.  
 Still kiss me! Care not for the cowards! Care  
 Only to put aside thy beauteous hair  
 My blood will hurt! The Three, I do not scorn  
 To death, because they never lived: but I 230  
 Have lived indeed, and so—(yet one more kiss)—can die!

206-7. Zorzi is the lover's servant; Zanze, the lady's.

222. *Siora*: Venetian equivalent of "Signora."

231. The sensational ending is in accord with the theatrical fashions of Browning's day; it was the great age of melodrama.

## ARTEMIS PROLOGIZES\*

I AM a goddess of the ambrosial courts,  
 And save by Here, Queen of Pride, surpassed  
 By none whose temples whiten this the world.  
 Through heaven I roll my lucid moon along;  
 I shed in hell o'er my pale people peace; 5  
 On earth I, caring for the creatures, guard  
 Each pregnant yellow wolf and fox-bitch sleek,  
 And every feathered mother's callow brood,  
 And all that love green haunts and loneliness.  
 Of men, the chaste adore me, hanging crowns 10  
 Of poppies red to blackness, bell and stem,

\* This is spoken by the goddess Artemis as prologue to a tragedy that Browning planned to write as a sequel to the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, Browning's favorite Greek dramatist. The poem was published in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). The Classical style of dignity, simplicity, and restraint has been caught very well by Browning; Matthew Arnold, one of the most thoroughly Classical writers in English, wrote, "one of the very best antique fragments I know is a fragment of a Hippolytus by him!" But Browning with his scientific attitude and his historical approach has given us a goddess more like those worshipped by the ancients than is common among English poets, who usually ignore the elements of primitive, bloody superstition. It was Artemis who demanded the human sacrifice of Iphigenia, subject of two other tragedies by Euripides. Sturge Moore calls this "perhaps the most splendid 120 lines of blank verse in English" (*Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, Second Series, XXXI, 1912, 42)—and indeed one must agree with Carlyle who said to Browning, "ye ought to translate the whole of the Greek tragedians—that's your vocation" (Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, p. 257).

In Euripides' play, *Hippolytus*, a young man, son of Theseus, is a chaste worshipper of Artemis (Diana) and scornful of Aphrodite (Venus). To punish him, Aphrodite inspires a passion for him in his step-mother Phaedra. When he repels Phaedra's advances, she hangs herself, leaving a note falsely accusing her step-son of improper conduct towards her. Theseus in his grief and anger prays Poseidon, god of the sea, to destroy his son, and after Hippolytus has been mortally wounded Artemis makes an appearance to reveal the truth. Browning intended to follow Virgil and Ovid, who tell that Hippolytus, after being healed by Aesculapius, was carried to Italy by Artemis and there fell in love with Aricia, one of her nymphs. Browning spells the names *Hippolytus*, *Phaedra*, etc., simply transliterating the Greek names directly, a practice he defended in the preface to his *Agamemnon*. This, too, shows a characteristic historical and scientific approach; a genuinely Classical taste would prefer the traditional English equivalents.

2. *Here*: Hera (Juno), queen of the gods.

Upon my image at Athenai here;  
 And this dead Youth, Asclepios bends above,  
 Was dearest to me. He, my buskined step  
 To follow through the wild-wood leafy ways, 15  
 And chase the panting stag, or swift with darts  
 Stop the swift ounce, or lay the leopard low,  
 Neglected homage to another god:  
 Whence Aphrodite, by no midnight smoke  
 Of tapers lulled, in jealousy despatched 20  
 A noisome lust that, as the gadbee stings,  
 Possessed his stepdame Phaidra for himself  
 The son of Theseus her great absent spouse.  
 Hippolotos exclaiming in his rage  
 Against the fury of the Queen, she judged 25  
 Life insupportable; and, pricked at heart  
 An Amazonian stranger's race should dare  
 To scorn her, perished by the murderous cord:  
 Yet, ere she perished, blasted in a scroll  
 The fame of him her swerving made not swerve. 30  
 And Theseus, read, returning, and believed,  
 And exiled, in the blindness of his wrath,  
 The man without a crime who, last as first,  
 Loyal, divulged not to his sire the truth.  
 Now Theseus from Poseidon had obtained 35  
 That of his wishes should be granted three,  
 And one he imprecated straight—"Alive  
 May ne'er Hippolotos reach other lands!"  
 Poseidon heard, ai ai! And scarce the prince  
 Had stepped into the fixed boots of the car 40  
 That give the feet a stay against the strength  
 Of the Henetian horses, and around  
 His body flung the rein, and urged their speed  
 Along the rocks and shingles of the shore,  
 When from the gaping wave a monster flung 45  
 His obscene body in the coursers' path.

12. *Athenai*: Athens.

13. *Asclepios*: Aesculapius, son of Phoebus (Phoibos) Apollo.

27. *Amazonian stranger*: Hippolyta, mother of Hippolytus and former wife of Theseus. Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* tells of their marriage.

42. *Henetian*: of a district near Paphlagonia.

'These, mad with terror, as the sea-bull sprawled  
 Wallowing about their feet, lost care of him  
 That reared them; and the master-chariot-pole  
 Snapping beneath their plunges like a reed, 50  
 Hippolutos, whose feet were trammelled fast,  
 Was yet dragged forward by the circling rein  
 Which either hand directed; nor they quenched  
 The frenzy of their flight before each trace,  
 Wheel-spoke and splinter of the woeful car, 55  
 Each boulder-stone, sharp stub and spiny shell,  
 Huge fish-bone wrecked and wreathed amid the sands  
 On that detested beach, was bright with blood  
 And morsels of his flesh: then fell the steeds  
 Head-foremost, crashing in their mooned fronts, 60  
 Shivering with sweat, each white eye horror-fixed.  
 His people, who had witnessed all afar,  
 Bore back the ruins of Hippolutos.  
 But when his sire, too swoln with pride, rejoiced  
 (Indomitable as a man foredoomed) 65  
 That vast Poseidon had fulfilled his prayer,  
 I, in a flood of glory visible,  
 Stood o'er my dying votary and, deed  
 By deed, revealed, as all took place, the truth.  
 Then Theseus lay the woefullest of men, 70  
 And worthily; but ere the death-veils hid  
 His face, the murdered prince full pardon breathed  
 To his rash sire. Whereat Athenai wails.

So I, who ne'er forsake my votaries,  
 Lest in the cross-way none the honey-cake 75  
 Should tender, nor pour out the dog's hot life;  
 Lest at my fane the priests disconsolate  
 Should dress my image with some faded poor  
 Few crowns, made favours of, nor dare object  
 Such slackness to my worshippers who turn 80  
 Elsewhere the trusting heart and loaded hand,  
 As they had climbed Olumpos to report  
 Of Artemis and nowhere found her throne—  
 I interposed: and, this eventful night,—  
 (While round the funeral pyre the populace 85  
 Stood with fierce light on their black robes which bound

Each sobbing head, while yet their hair they clipped  
 O'er the dead body of their withered prince,  
 And, in his palace, Theseus prostrated  
 On the cold hearth, his brow cold as the slab 90  
 'T was bruised on, groaned away the heavy grief—  
 As the pyre fell, and down the cross logs crashed  
 Sending a crowd of sparkles through the night,  
 And the gay fire, elate with mastery,  
 Towered like a serpent o'er the clotted jars 95  
 Of wine, dissolving oils and frankincense,  
 And splendid gums like gold),—my potency  
 Conveyed the perished man to my retreat  
 In the thrice-venerable forest here.  
 And this white-bearded sage who squeezes now 100  
 The berried plant, is Phoibos' son of fame,  
 Asclepius, whom my radiant brother taught  
 The doctrine of each herb and flower and root,  
 To know their secret's virtue and express  
 The saving soul of all: who so has soothed 105  
 With lavers the torn brow and murdered cheeks,  
 Composed the hair and brought its gloss again,  
 And called the red bloom to the pale skin back,  
 And laid the strips and jagged ends of flesh  
 Even once more, and slacked the sinew's knot 110  
 Of every tortured limb—that now he lies  
 As if mere sleep possessed him underneath  
 These interwoven oaks and pines. Oh cheer,  
 Divine presenter of the healing rod,  
 Thy snake, with ardent throat and lulling eye, 115  
 Twines his lithe spires around! I say, much cheer!  
 Proceed thou with thy wisest pharmacies!  
 And ye, white crowd of woodland sister-nymphs,  
 Ply, as the sage directs, these buds and leaves  
 That strew the turf around the twain! While I 120  
 Await, in fitting silence, the event.

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102. *My radiant brother*: Phoibos (Apollo, god of the sun, medicine, and the arts).

# RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI\*

## I

I know a Mount, the gracious Sun perceives  
 First, when he visits, last, too, when he leaves  
 The world; and, vainly favoured, it repays  
 The day-long glory of his steadfast gaze  
 By no change of its large calm front of snow. 5  
 And underneath the Mount, a Flower I know,  
 He cannot have perceived, that changes ever  
 At his approach; and, in the lost endeavour  
 To live his life, has parted, one by one,  
 With all a flower's true graces, for the grace 10  
 Of being but a foolish mimic sun,  
 With ray-like florets round a disk-like face.

\* This first appeared in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), where it was included with "Cristina" under the general title of "Queen-Worship." Geoffrey Rudel, a Provençal troubadour of the twelfth century (who had as patron the brother of Richard the Lion-Hearted), heard of the beauty of the Countess of Tripoli (a small duchy north of Palestine, ruled by Crusaders); and without seeing the lady, Rudel fell in love with her. (A few years after writing this poem Browning himself seems to have fallen in love with Elizabeth Barrett before seeing her; note his sympathy with the chivalric temperament.) Rudel wrote songs in her praise; and later, it is said, set out for the East to see her, only to die in her arms immediately of a fatal malady incurred on the journey. He had written in her praise:

It is resolved; I cross the tide,  
 I leave my native place;  
 O God, transport me to her side,  
 And let me see her face!  
 Grant me but life that I may tell  
 My tale to her I love so well.

(Translation from John Rutherford, *The Troubadours*, London, 1873, p. 119.) Browning's poem is true to the sentiments, and even the manner, of Rudel's poetry before he had seen his distant love. The situation, attitudes, emotions, and poetic devices, especially the symbolism, are in accord with the Medieval conventions of Courtly Love at the time of the Crusades.

1. The Sun of Love shines on the Mount (symbolizing the Lady), but she remains cold.

6. *Flower*: the sunflower, symbol of Rudel. Compare the following stanza from an actual poem by Rudel. Browning has caught the tone:

No other love shall shed its ray  
 On me, if not this love afar,  
 A brighter one, where'er I stray  
 I shall not see, or near, or far.

(Translation by Thomas Roscoe.)



Men nobly call by many a name the Mount  
 As over many a land of theirs its large  
 Calm front of snow like a triumphal targe 15  
 Is reared, and still with old names, fresh names vie,  
 Each to its proper praise and own account:  
 Men call the Flower the Sunflower, sportively.

## II

Oh, Angel of the East, one, one gold look  
 Across the waters to this twilight nook, 20  
 —The far sad waters, Angel, to this nook!

## III

Dear Pilgrim, art thou for the East indeed?  
 Go!—saying ever as thou dost proceed,  
 That I, French Rudel, choose for my device 25  
 A sunflower outspread like a sacrifice  
 Before its idol. See! These inexpert  
 And hurried fingers could not fail to hurt  
 The woven picture; 't is a woman's skill  
 Indeed; but nothing baffled me, so, ill  
 Or well, the work is finished. Say, men feed 30  
 On songs I sing, and therefore bask the bees  
 On my flower's breast as on a platform broad:  
 But, as the flower's concern is not for these  
 But solely for the sun, so men applaud  
 In vain this Rudel, he not looking here 35  
 But to the East—the East! Go, say this, Pilgrim dear!

## CRISTINA\*

## I

SHE should never have looked at me  
 If she meant I should not love her!

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\* This was published first in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) as Part II of "Queen-Worship," Part I being "Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli." It is addressed to Maria Cristina, Queen of Spain between 1829 and 1841, a dissolute coquette, hated and despised by her subjects. In 1841 the discovery of her secret marriage to an officer forced her to abdicate her regency. In this poem one man whom her glance has entranced feels that he still has her because he loves her, though she has turned aside from him. He looks forward to Heaven and the fruition of his Queen-worship.

There are plenty . . . men, you call such,  
I suppose . . . she may discover  
All her soul to, if she pleases, 5  
And yet leave much as she found them:  
But I 'm not so, and she knew it  
When she fixed me, glancing round them.

## II

What? To fix me thus meant nothing?  
But I can't tell (there 's my weakness) 10  
What her look said!—no vile cant, sure,  
About "need to strew the bleakness  
Of some lone shore with its pearl-seed,  
That the sea feels"—no "strange yearning  
That such souls have, most to lavish 15  
Where there 's chance of least returning."

## III

Oh, we 're sunk enough here, God knows!  
But not quite so sunk that moments,  
Sure tho' seldom, are denied us,  
When the spirit's true endowments 20  
Stand out plainly from its false ones,  
And apprise it if pursuing  
Or the right way or the wrong way,  
To its triumph or undoing.

## IV

There are flashes struck from midnights, 25  
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,  
Whereby piled-up honours perish,  
Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,  
While just this or that poor impulse,  
Which for once had play unstifled, 30  
Seems the sole work of a life-time  
That away the rest have trifled.

## V

Doubt you if, in some such moment,  
As she fixed me, she felt clearly,  
Ages past the soul existed, 35  
Here an age 't is resting merely,

And hence fleets again for ages,  
 While the true end, sole and single,  
 It stops here for is, this love-way,  
 With some other soul to mingle? 40

## VI

Else it loses what it lived for,  
 And eternally must lose it;  
 Better ends may be in prospect,  
 Deeper blisses (if you choose it),  
 But this life's end and this love-bliss 45  
 Have been lost here. Doubt you whether  
 This she felt as, looking at me,  
 Mine and her souls rushed together?

## VII

Oh, observe! Of course, next moment,  
 The world's honours, in derision, 50  
 Trampled out the light for ever:  
 Never fear but there 's provision  
 Of the devil's to quench knowledge  
 Lest we walk the earth in rapture!  
 —Making those who catch God's secret 55  
 Just so much more prize their capture!

## VIII

Such am I: the secret 's mine now!  
 She has lost me, I have gained her;  
 Her soul 's mine: and thus, grown perfect,  
 I shall pass my life's remainder. 60  
 Life will just hold out the proving  
 Both our powers, alone and blended:  
 And then, come the next life quickly!  
 This world's use will have been ended.

## JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION\*

THERE 's heaven above, and night by night  
 I look right through its gorgeous roof;

\* In *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) this appeared with "Porphyria's Lover" under the general title, "Madhouse Cells." But it had been printed, January, 1836, in the *Monthly Repository*, edited by W. J. Fox, a popular

No suns and moons though e'er so bright  
 Avail to stop me; splendour-proof  
 I keep the broods of stars aloof: 5  
 For I intend to get to God,  
 For 't is to God I speed so fast,  
 For in God's breast, my own abode,  
 Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,  
 I lay my spirit down at last. 10  
 I lie where I have always lain,  
 God smiles as he has always smiled;  
 Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,  
 Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled  
 The heavens, God thought on me his child; 15

preacher, and friend of Browning's family circle, who was moving from Calvinism to Unitarianism. Johannes Agricola, Martin Luther's assistant and opponent, was the founder of Antinomianism, a heresy espoused by some Calvinists and Wesleyans, which in its extreme form (here ascribed to Agricola himself) declared that the elect, predestined to eternal salvation, can not sin, even though they commit evil acts. (More orthodox Calvinism considers an evil act evidence that the sinner is one of those predestined to be damned.) In the *Monthly Repository* the following note is prefaced to the poem: "Antinomians, so denominated for rejecting the Law as a thing of no use under the Gospel dispensation: they say, that good works do not further, nor evil works hinder salvation; that the child of God can not sin, that God never chastiseth him, that murder, drunkenness, etc. are sins in the wicked but not in him, that the child of grace being once assured of salvation, afterwards never doubteth . . . that God doth not love any man for his holiness, that sanctification is no evidence of justification, etc. Potanus, in his Catalogue of Heresies, says John Agricola was the author of this sect, A.D. 1535.—*Dictionary of all Religions*, 1704."

The very rhythm of the poem betrays the elation of a "madhouse cell." Yet even here the speaker cannot be entirely separated from Browning whose teaching, as Dean Inge points out, "is in danger of antinomianism, as . . . 'The Flight of the Duchess' and 'The Statue and the Bust,' for example—prove." (*Studies of English Mystics*, p. 232.) Browning did not believe in Hell, and was certain that he would get to Heaven sooner or later. Thus he would disagree with what Agricola says at the end, but would agree with what he says at the beginning. It is interesting to try to determine how far in the poem Agricola may be taken as the spokesman of some of Browning's beliefs, and at what point Browning parts company with him. Browning's background was Calvinistic; notice this statement in the Westminster Confession (XVII, 1): "They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved." In his "Epilogue" to *Asolando* Browning expresses his "assurance" that he will be eternally saved in the end.

Ordained a life for me, arrayed  
 Its circumstances every one  
 To the minutest; ay, God said  
 This head this hand should rest upon  
 Thus, ere he fashioned star or sun. 20  
 And having thus created me,  
 Thus rooted me, he bade me grow,  
 Guiltless for ever, like a tree  
 That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know  
 The law by which it prospers so: 25  
 But sure that thought and word and deed  
 All go to swell his love for me,  
 Me, made because that love had need  
 Of something irreversibly  
 Pledged solely its content to be. 30  
 Yes, yes, a tree which must ascend,  
 No poison-gourd foredoomed to stoop!  
 I have God's warrant, could I blend  
 All hideous sins, as in a cup,  
 To drink the mingled venoms up; 35  
 Secure my nature will convert  
 The draught to blossoming gladness fast:  
 While sweet dews turn to the gourd's hurt,  
 And bloat, and while they bloat it, blast,  
 As from the first its lot was cast. 40  
 For as I lie, smiled on, full-fed  
 By unexhausted power to bless,  
 I gaze below on hell's fierce bed,  
 And those its waves of flame oppress,  
 Swarming in ghastly wretchedness; 45  
 Whose life on earth aspired to be  
 One altar-smoke, so pure!—to win  
 If not love like God's love for me,  
 At least to keep his anger in;  
 And all their striving turned to sin. 50  
 Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white  
 With prayer, the broken-hearted nun,  
 The martyr, the wan acolyte,  
 The incense-swinging child,—undone  
 Before God fashioned star or sun! 55

43. That Browning did not believe in Hell is shown in his "Txion," "A Camel-Driver," and "The Inn Album" (1732-91).

God, whom I praise; how could I praise,  
 If such as I might understand,  
 Make out and reckon on his ways,  
 And bargain for his love, and stand,  
 Paying a price, at his right hand?

60

## PORPHYRIA'S LOVER\*

THE rain set early in to-night,  
 The sullen wind was soon awake,  
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
 And did its worst to vex the lake:  
 I listened with heart fit to break.

When glided in Porphyria; straight

She shut the cold out and the storm,  
 And kneeled and made the cheerless grate  
 Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;  
 Which done, she rose, and from her form

Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,  
 And laid her soiled gloves by, untied  
 Her hat and let the damp hair fall,  
 And, last, she sat down by my side  
 And called me. When no voice replied,

She put my arm about her waist,  
 And made her smooth white shoulder bare,  
 And all her yellow hair displaced,  
 And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,  
 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,

Murmuring how she loved me—she

Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,  
 To set its struggling passion free  
 From pride, and vainer ties dissever,  
 And give herself to me for ever.

5

10

15

20

25

58-60. Cf. "All service ranks the same with God" (*Pippa Passes*, 190), generally supposed to express Browning's own belief.

\* This was first printed as "Porphyria" in the *Monthly Repository*, January, 1836, accompanied by "Johannes Agricola." The two poems appeared under the general title "Madhouse Cells" in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). This is the first of Browning's short dramatic monologues and the first of his studies in abnormal psychology. Artistically it is one of his most successful poems. The speaker is the lover, who has strangled Porphyria with her own hair. See C. R. Tracy, "Porphyria's Lover," *Mod. Lang. Notes*, LII (1937), 579-80.

But passion sometimes would prevail,  
 Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain  
 A sudden thought of one so pale  
 For love of her, and all in vain:  
 So, she was come through wind and rain 30  
 Be sure I looked up at her eyes  
 Happy and proud; at last I knew  
 Porphyria worshipped me; surprise  
 Made my heart swell, and still it grew  
 While I debated what to do. 35  
 That moment she was mine, mine, fair,  
 Perfectly pure and good: I found  
 A thing to do, and all her hair  
 In one long yellow string I wound  
 Three times her little throat around, 40  
 And strangled her. No pain felt she;  
 I am quite sure she felt no pain.  
 As a shut bud that holds a bee,  
 I warily oped her lids: again  
 Laughed the blue eyes without a stain. 45  
 And I untightened next the tress  
 About her neck; her cheek once more  
 Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:  
 I propped her head up as before,  
 Only, this time my shoulder bore 50  
 Her head, which droops upon it still:  
 The smiling rosy little head,  
 So glad it has its utmost will,  
 That all it scorned at once is fled,  
 And I, its love, am gained instead! 55  
 Porphyria's love: she guessed not how  
 Her darling one wish would be heard.  
 And thus we sit together now,  
 And all night long we have not stirred,  
 And yet God has not said a word! 60

60. In *Browning, How to Know Him* (1915, p. 106) William Lyon Phelps mentions three possible meanings for this last line: that God has not struck him with a thunderbolt and hence approves the murder; that God has disappointed him by not saying, as he expected, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased"; or that God is indifferent. Browning himself did not believe that God has an eternal system of rewards

## THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR\*

## I

As I ride, as I ride,  
 With a full heart for my guide,  
 So its tide rocks my side,  
 As I ride, as I ride,  
 That, as I were double-eyed, 5  
 He, in whom our Tribes confide,  
 Is descried, ways untried  
 As I ride, as I ride.

## II

As I ride, as I ride  
 To our Chief and his Allied, 10  
 Who dares chide my heart's pride  
 As I ride, as I ride?  
 Or are witnesses denied—  
 Through the desert waste and wide  
 Do I glide unespied 15  
 As I ride, as I ride?

## III

As I ride, as I ride,  
 When an inner voice has cried,  
 The sands slide, nor abide  
 (As I ride, as I ride) 20  
 O'er each visioned homicide  
 That came vaunting (has he lied?)  
 To reside—where he died,  
 As I ride, as I ride.

and punishment, but that every afterlife leads to Heaven sooner or later. Browning often intends to put the truth in the mouths of madmen and sinners.

\* This represents an Arab dashing through the desert of Metidja (in Algeria) to join his chieftain, Abd-el-Kadr (1807-1883), an Arabian leader who united the tribes to resist French invasion. Algeria, whose coast Browning had seen in 1838, was in revolt against the French when this poem was published in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). Notice the great metrical skill with which the poet has succeeded in making us feel the strong rhythm of the horse's gallop. Compare "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix."



## IV

As I ride, as I ride, 25  
 Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,  
 Yet his hide, streaked and pied,  
 As I ride, as I ride,  
 Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,  
 —Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed— 30  
 How has vied stride with stride  
 As I ride, as I ride!

## V

As I ride, as I ride,  
 Could I loose what Fate has tied,  
 Ere I pried, she should hide 35  
 (As I ride, as I ride)  
 All that's meant me—satisfied  
 When the Prophet and the Bride  
 Stop veins I'd have subside  
 As I ride, as I ride! 40

### THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN\* A CHILD'S STORY

(WRITTEN FOR, AND INSCRIBED TO, W. M. THE YOUNGER)

## I

HAMELIN Town 's in Brunswick,  
 By famous Hanover city;  
 The river Weser, deep and wide,

38. Mohammed ("The Prophet") said his wife Ayesha would be his wife in Paradise.

\* Written to amuse a friend's sick child, this poem evidently seemed to Browning hardly worth publishing; he sent it to the printer late as additional "copy" to fill out the last pages of *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). It is his best known poem, and has been translated into many languages. For the sources of the story see Cooke, *Guide-Book to Browning*, pp. 291-4; DeVane, *Browning Handbook*, pp. 115-9, and Dickson, "Browning's Source for the 'Pied Piper of Hamelin'" *Studies in Philology*, XXIII (1926), pp. 327-32. Robert Browning's father, who probably introduced his son to the story, also began a poem on the subject in 1842, "not knowing that Robert had written on this subject," but did not complete it until after this poem had been published.

W. M.—William Macready, son of the great actor of the same name. Browning wrote this poem to provide him something to illustrate.

Washes its wall on the southern side;  
 A pleasanter spot you never spied;  
     But, when begins my ditty,  
 Almost five hundred years ago,  
 To see the townsfolk suffer so  
     From vermin, was a pity.

## II

Rats! 10  
 They fought the dogs and killed the cats,  
     And bit the babies in the cradles,  
 And ate the cheeses out of the vats,  
     And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,  
 Split open the keys of salted sprats, 15  
 Made nests inside men's Sunday hats.  
 And even spoiled the women's chats  
     By drowning their speaking  
     With shrieking and squeaking  
 In fifty different sharps and flats. 20

## III

At last the people in a body  
     To the Town Hall came flocking:  
 " 'T is clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy;  
     And as for our Corporation—shocking  
 To think we buy gowns lined with ermine 25  
 For dolts that can't or won't determine  
 What's best to rid us of our vermin!  
 You hope, because you're old and obese,  
 To find in the furry civic robe ease?  
 Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking 30  
 To find the remedy we're lacking,  
 Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"  
 At this the Mayor and Corporation  
 Quaked with a mighty consternation.

## IV

An hour they sat in council 35  
     At length the Mayor broke silence:  
 "For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell,  
     I wish I were a mile hence!

It's easy to bid one rack one's brain—  
 I'm sure my poor head aches again, 40  
 I've scratched it so, and all in vain.  
 Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!"  
 Just as he said this, what should hap  
 At the chamber door but a gentle tap?  
 "Bless us," cried the Mayor, "what's that?" 45  
 (With the Corporation as he sat,  
 Looking little though wondrous fat;  
 Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister  
 Than a too-long-opened oyster,  
 Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous 50  
 For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)  
 "Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?  
 Anything like the sound of a rat  
 Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!"

## V

"Come in!"—the Mayor cried, looking bigger: 55  
 And in did come the strangest figure!  
 His queer long coat from heel to head  
 Was half of yellow and half of red,  
 And he himself was tall and thin,  
 With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin, 60  
 And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,  
 No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,  
 But lips where smiles went out and in;  
 There was no guessing his kith and kin:  
 And nobody could enough admire 65  
 The tall man and his quaint attire.  
 Quoth one: "It's as my great-grandsire,  
 Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,  
 Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!"

## VI

He advanced to the council-table: 70  
 And, "Please your honours," said he, "I'm able,  
 By means of a secret charm, to draw  
 All creatures living beneath the sun,  
 That creep or swim or fly or run,

After me so as you never saw!  
 And I chiefly use my charm  
 On creatures that do people harm,  
 The mole and toad and newt and viper;  
 And people call me the Pied Piper."  
 (And here they noticed round his neck  
     A scarf of red and yellow stripe,  
 To match with his coat of the self-same cheque;  
     And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;  
 And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying  
 As if impatient to be playing  
 Upon this pipe, as low it dangled  
 Over his vesture so old-fangled.)  
 "Yet," said he, "poor piper as I am,  
 In Tartary I freed the Cham,  
     Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;  
 I eased in Asia the Nizam  
     Of a monstrous brood of vampire-bats:  
 And as for what your brain bewilders,  
     If I can rid your town of rats  
 Will you give me a thousand guilders?"  
 "One? fifty thousand!"—was the exclamation  
 Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

## VII

Into the street the Piper stept,  
     Smiling first a little smile,  
 As if he knew what magic slept  
     In his quiet pipe the while;  
 Then like a musical adept,  
 To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,  
 And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,  
 Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;  
 And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,  
 You heard as if an army muttered;  
 And the muttering grew to a grumbling;  
 And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;  
 And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.

89. *Cham*: ruler of Tartary.91. *Nizam*: ruler of Hyderabad in India.

Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,  
 Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats,  
 Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,  
     Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,  
 Cocking tails and pricking whiskers, 115  
     Families by tens and dozens,  
 Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—  
 Followed the Piper for their lives.  
 From street to street he piped advancing,  
 And step for step they followed dancing, 120  
 Until they came to the river Weser,  
     Wherein all plunged and perished!  
 —Save one who, stout as Julius Cæsar,  
 Swam across and lived to carry  
     (As he, the manuscript he cherished) 125  
 To Rat-land home his commentary:  
 Which was, "At the first shrill notes of the pipe,  
 I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,  
 And putting apples, wondrous ripe,  
 Into a cider-press's gripe: 130  
 And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,  
 And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,  
 And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,  
 And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:  
 And it seemed as if a voice 135  
     (Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery  
 Is breathed) called out, 'Oh rats, rejoice!  
 The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!  
 So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,  
 Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!' 140  
 And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,  
 All ready staved, like a great sun shone  
 Glorious scarce an inch before me,  
 Just as methought it said, 'Come, bore me!  
 —I found the Weser rolling o'er me." 145

123. When Cæsar's ship was captured at the siege of Alexandria (48 B.C.), it is said that Cæsar swam to safety carrying the manuscript of his *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars*.

133. *Train-oil-flasks*: flasks of whale oil.

138. *Drysaltery*: place for the sale of pickles and dried meats.

139. *Nuncheon*: light luncheon.

141. *Puncheon*: cask.

## VIII

You should have heard the Hamelin people  
 Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.  
 "Go," cried the Mayor, "and get long poles,  
 Poke out the nests and block up the holes!  
 Consult with carpenters and builders, 150  
 And leave in our town not even a trace  
 Of the rats!"—when suddenly, up the face  
 Of the Piper perked in the market-place,  
 With a, "First, if you please, my thousand guilders!"

## IX

A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue; 155  
 So did the Corporation too.  
 For council dinners made rare havoc  
 With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;  
 And half the money would replenish  
 Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish. 160  
 To pay this sum to a wandering fellow  
 With a gypsy coat of red and yellow!  
 "Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,  
 "Our business was done at the river's brink;  
 We saw with our eyes the vermin sink, 165  
 And what's dead can't come to life, I think.  
 So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink  
 From the duty of giving you something for drink,  
 And a matter of money to put in your poke;  
 But as for the guilders, what we spoke 170  
 Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.  
 Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.  
 A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"

## X

The Piper's face fell, and he cried  
 "No trifling! I can't wait, beside! 175  
 I've promised to visit by dinnertime  
 Bagdat, and accept the prime  
 Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,  
 For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,

158. Names of famous wines from various regions.

160. *Rhenish*: wine from the Rhine district.

Of a nest of scorpions no survivor: 180  
 With him I proved no bargain-driver,  
 With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver!  
 And folks who put me in a passion  
 May find me pipe after another fashion."

## XI

"How?" cried the Mayor, "d'ye think I brook 185  
 Being worse treated than a Cook?  
 Insulted by a lazy ribald  
 With idle pipe and vesture piebald?  
 You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,  
 Blow your pipe there till you burst!" 190

## XII

Once more he stept into the street  
 And to his lips again  
 Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;  
 And ere he blew three notes (such sweet  
 Soft notes as yet musician's cunning 195  
 Never gave the enraptured air)  
 There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling  
 Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,  
 Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,  
 Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering, 200  
 And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,  
 Out came the children running.  
 All the little boys and girls,  
 With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,  
 And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls, 205  
 Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after  
 The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

## XIII

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood  
 As if they were changed into blocks of wood,  
 Unable to move a step, or cry 210  
 To the children merrily skipping by,  
 —Could only follow with the eye  
 That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.

But how the Mayor was on the rack,  
And the wretched Council's bosoms beat, 215  
As the Piper turned from the High Street  
To where the Weser rolled its waters  
Right in the way of their sons and daughters!  
However, he turned from South to West,  
And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed, 220  
And after him the children pressed;  
Great was the joy in every breast.  
"He never can cross that mighty top!  
He's forced to let the piping drop,  
And we shall see our children stop!" 225  
When, lo, as they reached the mountain-side,  
A wondrous portal opened wide,  
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;  
And the Piper advanced and the children followed,  
And when all were in to the very last, 230  
The door in the mountain-side shut fast.  
Did I say, all? No! One was lame,  
And could not dance the whole of the way;  
And in after years, if you would blame  
His sadness, he was used to say,— 235  
"It's dull in our town since my playmates left!  
I can't forget that I'm bereft  
Of all the pleasant sights they see,  
Which the Piper also promised me.  
For he led us, he said, to a joyous land, 240  
Joining the town and just at hand,  
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew  
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,  
And everything was strange and new;  
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here, 245  
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,  
And honey-bees had lost their stings,  
And horses were born with eagles' wings:

220-231. There are more imposing "mountains" around Hamelin than Koppelberg Hill, which is hardly more than a slight elevation of ground, just high enough to swallow children up out of sight as they might walk out of town. This has been taken as evidence that some real event lies behind the story, like the Children's Crusade of 1211, or one of the dancing manias that sometimes spread through Medieval towns.



And just as I became assured  
 My lame foot would be speedily cured, 250  
 The music stopped and I stood still,  
 And found myself outside the hill,  
 Left alone against my will,  
 To go now limping as before,  
 And never hear of that country more!" 255

## XIV

Alas, alas for Hamelin!

There came into many a burgher's pate  
 A text which says that heaven's gate  
 Opes to the rich at as easy rate  
 As the needle's eye takes a camel in! 260  
 The Mayor sent East, West, North and South,  
 To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,  
 Wherever it was men's lot to find him,  
 Silver and gold to his heart's content,  
 If he'd only return the way he went, 265  
 And bring the children behind him.  
 But when they saw 't was a lost endeavour,  
 And Piper and dancers were gone for ever,  
 They made a decree that lawyers never  
 Should think their records dated duly 270  
 If, after the day of the month and year,  
 These words did not as well appear,  
 "And so long after what happened here  
 On the Twenty-second of July,  
 Thirteen hundred and seventy-six:" 275  
 And the better in memory to fix  
 The place of the children's last retreat,  
 They called it, the Pied Piper's Street—  
 Where any one playing on pipe or tabor  
 Was sure for the future to lose his labour. 280  
 Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern  
 To shock with mirth a street so solemn;

258-60. Matthew, xix, 24.

270-75. For some time the town of Hamelin dated its public records from this event, usually dated 1284. The date 1376 used by Browning agrees with that in the account in Verstegen's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities*.

But opposite the place of the cavern  
 They wrote the story on a column,  
 And on the great church-window painted 285  
 The same, to make the world acquainted  
 How their children were stolen away,  
 And there it stands to this very day.  
 And I must not omit to say  
 That in Transylvania there's a tribe 290  
 Of alien people who ascribe  
 The outlandish ways and dress  
 On which their neighbours lay such stress,  
 To their fathers and mothers having risen  
 Out of some subterraneous prison 295  
 Into which they were trepanned  
 Long time ago in a mighty band  
 Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,  
 But how or why, they don't understand.

XV

So, Willy, let me and you be wipers 300  
 Of scores out with all men—especially pipers!  
 And, whether they pipe us free from rats or from mice,  
 If we've promised them aught, let us keep our promise!

"HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS  
 FROM GHENT TO AIX"\*

[16—.]

I

I SPRANG to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;  
 I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;  
 "Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;  
 "Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through;  
 Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest, 5  
 And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

290 ff. Transylvania is a district in Central Europe, formerly part of Hungary. The Saxon people are widely scattered over Europe.

\* Like a historical novelist, Browning is more interested in the typical atmosphere of an age or nation than in specific, verifiable events. He wrote, "there is no historical incident whatever commemorated by [this] poem . . . which I wrote at sea, off the African Coast, with a merely general

## II

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace  
 Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;  
 I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,  
 Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right, 10  
 Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,  
 Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

## III

'T was moonset at starting; but while we drew near  
 Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear;  
 At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see; 15  
 At Düffeld, 't was morning as plain as could be;  
 And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,  
 So, Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

## IV

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,  
 And against him the cattle stood black every one, 20  
 To stare thro' the mist at us galloping past,  
 And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,  
 With resolute shoulders, each butting away  
 The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

## V

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back 25  
 For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;

impression of the characteristic warfare and besieging which abound in the annals of Flanders." He deals specially, of course, with the struggle of the Netherlands for freedom from Spain in the sixteenth century. His biographers also suggest that Browning may have been thinking of his trip to Russia in 1834 when even Belgium had no railways and he covered 1500 miles, travelling day and night as fast as the horses could go (Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, p. 61). Ghent is a city in Flanders, Belgium; Aix is Aix-la-Chapelle, in West Prussia, about 100 miles from Ghent. The other towns mentioned lie between these two, but Looz and Tongres lie out of the direct route and add about 20 miles to the ride. The poem was published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). It should be compared to the prose "Night of Spurs" in Carlyle's *French Revolution*, a book from which Browning probably learned some of his historical art. The rhythm is one of breathless but tireless gallop, and suggests the modern love of speed, of which Browning is preëminently the poet.

10. *Pique*: pommel of the saddle.

And one eye's black intelligence,—ever that glance  
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!  
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon  
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on. 30

VI

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, "Stay spur!  
Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault 's not in her,  
We 'll remember at Aix"—for one heard the quick wheeze  
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,  
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank, 35  
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

VII

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,  
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;  
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,  
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff; 40  
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,  
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in sight!"

VIII

"How they 'll greet us!"—and all in a moment his roan  
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;  
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight 45  
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,  
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,  
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

IX

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,  
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all, 50  
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,  
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;  
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,  
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

X

And all I remember is—friends flocking round 55  
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;  
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,

As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,  
 Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)  
 Was no more than his due who brought good news from  
 Ghent. 60

## PICTOR IGNOTUS\*

FLORENCE, 15—.

I COULD have painted pictures like that youth's  
 Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar  
 Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!  
 —Never did fate forbid me, star by star,  
 To outburst on your night with all my gift 5  
 Of fires from God: nor would my flesh have shrunk  
 From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift  
 And wide to heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk  
 To the centre, of an instant; or around  
 Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan 10  
 The license and the limit, space and bound,  
 Allowed to truth made visible in man.  
 And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,  
 Over the canvas could my hand have flung,  
 Each face obedient to its passion's law, 15  
 Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue;  
 Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,  
 A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,  
 Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood  
 Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place; 20  
 Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,  
 And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,—  
 O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?  
 What did ye give me that I have not saved?  
 Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!) 25  
 Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth,

\* The speaker is some early "unknown painter" (Latin, *pictor ignotus*), one of those who produced the monotonous series of Virgins and Saints on the monastery walls, in the period of transition in painting from Medieval religious devotion and anonymity to Renaissance individualism and love of fame and wealth. Berdoe thinks the poem might be "considered as uttered by a Fra Angelico with reference to Raffaele. The great monastic painters, like Angelico, painted under the eye of God . . . for God and through God,

As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,  
 To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South, or North,  
 Bound for the calmly-satisfied great State,  
 Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went, 30  
 Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,  
 Through old streets named afresh from the event,  
 Till it reached home, where learned age should greet  
 My face, and youth, the star not yet distinct  
 Above his hair, lie learning at my feet!— 35  
 Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked  
 With love about, and praise, till life should end,  
 And then not go to heaven, but linger here,  
 Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend,—  
 The thought grew frightful, 't was so wildly dear! 40  
 But a voice changed it. Glimpses of such sights  
 Have scared me, like the revels through a door  
 Of some strange house of idols at its rites!  
 This world seemed not the world it was before:  
 Mixed with my loving trusting ones, there trooped 45  
 . . . Who summoned those cold faces that begun  
 To press on me and judge me? Though I stooped  
 Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,  
 They drew me forth, and spite of me . . . enough!  
 These buy and sell our pictures, take and give, 50  
 Count them for garniture and household-stuff,  
 And where they live needs must our pictures live  
 And see their faces, listen to their prate,  
 Partakers of their daily pettiness,  
 Discussed of,—“This I love, or this I hate, 55  
 This likes me more, and this affects me less!”  
 Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles  
 My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint  
 These endless cloisters and eternal aisles  
 With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint, 60  
 With the same cold calm beautiful regard,—  
 At least no merchant traffics in my heart;

---

not through men and for men” (*Browning Cyclopaedia*, pp. 338-9).  
 Pictor Ignotus could not bear to submit pictures of real worth to the  
 praise of the vulgar world. Contrast Fra Lippo Lippi, who represents the  
 rising Renaissance, as this painter represents the dying Middle Ages. The  
 poem was published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845).

The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward  
 Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart:  
 Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine 65  
 While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,  
 They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,  
 'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.  
 So, die my pictures! surely, gently die!  
 O youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its worth? 70  
 Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?  
 Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?

### THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND\*

THAT second time they hunted me  
 From hill to plain, from shore to sea,  
 And Austria, hounding far and wide  
 Her blood-hounds thro' the country-side,  
 Breathed hot and instant on my trace,— 5  
 I made six days a hiding-place  
 Of that dry green old aqueduct  
 Where I and Charles, when boys, have plucked  
 The fire-flies from the roof above,  
 Bright creeping thro' the moss they love: 10  
 —How long it seems since Charles was lost!

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67. *Travertine*: white limestone.

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\* This appeared originally in *Dramatic Romances* (1845) under the title "Italy in England" as companion piece to "England in Italy" ("The Englishman in Italy"). In 1844 the Bandiera brothers led an uprising of young Italians against the Austrians in Naples. With seven of their followers they were captured and executed. This revolt aroused much interest in England, and was probably in Browning's mind when he wrote this poem, though the scene is that of the uprising of 1823 in Northern Italy. The great Italian leader Mazzini, who was living as an exile in England when the poem was published, told Browning that he had read it to fellow-refugees to show how an Englishman could sympathize with them. Sympathy with the Italian struggle for liberty is shown also in *Pippa Passes* and in Mrs. Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows*. In her letter to Browning, November 15, 1845, she praises this poem.

5. *Instant*: pressing.

8. *Charles*: Carlo Alberto, King of Sardinia. As a youth he had joined the liberal Carbonari, but later took severe measures against the "Young Italy" movement of Mazzini. In the revolt of 1848 (after this poem had been published) he led the Italians against Austria, but was defeated.

Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed  
 The country in my very sight;  
 And when that peril ceased at night,  
 The sky broke out in red dismay 15  
 With signal fires; well, there I lay  
 Close covered o'er in my recess,  
 Up to the neck in ferns and cress,  
 Thinking on Metternich our friend,  
 And Charles's miserable end, 20  
 And much beside, two days; the third,  
 Hunger o'ercame me when I heard  
 The peasants from the village go  
 To work among the maize; you know,  
 With us in Lombardy, they bring 25  
 Provisions packed on mules, a string  
 With little bells that cheer their task,  
 And casks, and boughs on every cask  
 To keep the sun's heat from the wine;  
 These I let pass in jingling line, 30  
 And, close on them, dear noisy crew,  
 The peasants from the village, too;  
 For at the very rear would troop  
 Their wives and sisters in a group  
 To help, I knew. When these had passed, 35  
 I threw my glove to strike the last,  
 Taking the chance: she did not start,  
 Much less cry out, but stooped apart,  
 One instant rapidly glanced round,  
 And saw me beckon from the ground. 40  
 A wild bush grows and hides my crypt;  
 She picked my glove up while she stripped  
 A branch off, then rejoined the rest  
 With that; my glove lay in her breast.  
 Then I drew breath; they disappeared: 45  
 It was for Italy I feared.

An hour, and she returned alone  
 Exactly where my glove was thrown.  
 Meanwhile came many thoughts: on me

19. *Metternich*: reactionary Austrian statesman who organized the opposition to the revolutionary movement for liberating subject nationalities.



Rested the hopes of Italy. 50  
 I had devised a certain tale  
 Which, when 't was told her, could not fail  
 Persuade a peasant of its truth;  
 I meant to call a freak of youth  
 This hiding, and give hopes of pay, 55  
 And no temptation to betray.  
 But when I saw that woman's face,  
 Its calm simplicity of grace,  
 Our Italy's own attitude  
 In which she walked thus far, and stood, 60  
 Planting each naked foot so firm,  
 To crush the snake and spare the worm—  
 At first sight of her eyes, I said,  
 "I am that man upon whose head  
 They fix the price, because I hate 65  
 The Austrians over us: the State  
 Will give you gold—oh, gold so much!—  
 If you betray me to their clutch,  
 And be your death, for aught I know,  
 If once they find you saved their foe. 70  
 Now, you must bring me food and drink,  
 And also paper, pen and ink,  
 And carry safe what I shall write  
 To Padua, which you'll reach at night  
 Before the *duomo* shuts; go in, 75  
 And wait till *Tenebræ* begin;  
 Walk to the third confessional,  
 Between the pillar and the wall,  
 And kneeling whisper, *Whence comes peace?*  
 Say it a second time, then cease; 80  
 And if the voice inside returns,  
*From Christ and Freedom; what concerns*  
*The cause of Peace?*—for answer, slip  
 My letter where you placed your lip;  
 Then come back happy we have done 85  
 Our mother service—I, the son,  
 As you the daughter of our land!"

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75. *Duomo*: the cathedral.

76. *Tenebræ*: church service commemorating the Crucifixion, during the last three days of Holy Week.

Three mornings more, she took her stand  
 In the same place, with the same eyes:  
 I was no surer of sun-rise 90  
 Than of her coming. We conferred  
 Of her own prospects, and I heard  
 She had a lover—stout and tall,  
 She said—then let her eyelids fall,  
 “He could do much”—as if some doubt 95  
 Entered her heart,—then, passing out,  
 “She could not speak for others, who  
 Had other thoughts; herself she knew:”  
 And so she brought me drink and food.  
 After four days, the scouts pursued 100  
 Another path; at last arrived  
 The help my Paduan friends contrived  
 To furnish me: she brought the news.  
 For the first time I could not choose  
 But kiss her hand, and lay my own 105  
 Upon her head—“This faith was shown  
 To Italy, our mother; she  
 Uses my hand and blesses thee.”  
 She followed down to the sea-shore;  
 I left and never saw her more. 110

How very long since I have thought  
 Concerning—much less wished for—aught  
 Beside the good of Italy,  
 For which I live and mean to die!  
 I never was in love; and since 115  
 Charles proved false, what shall now convince  
 My inmost heart I have a friend?  
 However, if I pleased to spend  
 Real wishes on myself—say, three—  
 I know at least what one should be. 120  
 I would grasp Metternich until  
 I felt his red wet throat distil  
 In blood thro’ these two hands. And next,  
 —Nor much for that am I perplexed—  
 Charles, perjured traitor, for his part, 125  
 Should die slow of a broken heart  
 Under his new employers. Last

—Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast  
 Do I grow old and out of strength.  
 If I resolved to seek at length 130  
 My father's house again, how scared  
 They all would look, and unprepared!  
 My brothers live in Austria's pay  
 —Disowned me long ago, men say;  
 And all my early mates who used 135  
 To praise me so—perhaps induced  
 More than one early step of mine—  
 Are turning wise: while some opine  
 "Freedom grows license," some suspect  
 "Haste breeds delay," and recollect 140  
 They always said, such premature  
 Beginnings never could endure!  
 So, with a sullen "All's for best,"  
 The land seems settling to its rest.  
 I think then, I should wish to stand 145  
 This evening in that dear, lost land,  
 Over the sea the thousand miles,  
 And know if yet that woman smiles  
 With the calm smile; some little farm  
 She lives in there, no doubt: what harm 150  
 If I sat on the door-side bench,  
 And, while her spindle made a trench  
 Fantastically in the dust,  
 Inquired of all her fortunes—just  
 Her children's ages and their names, 155  
 And what may be the husband's aims  
 For each of them. I'd talk this out  
 And sit there, for an hour about,  
 Then kiss her hand once more and lay  
 Mine on her head, and go my way. 160

So much for idle wishing—how  
 It steals the time! To business now.

## THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY\*

## PIANO DI SORRENTO

FORTÙ, Fortù, my beloved one,  
 Sit here by my side,  
 On my knees put up both little feet!  
 I was sure, if I tried,  
 I could make you laugh spite of Scirocco. 5  
 Now, open your eyes,  
 Let me keep you amused till he vanish  
 In black from the skies,  
 With telling my memories over  
 As you tell your beads; 10  
 All the Plain saw me gather, I garland  
 —The flowers or the weeds.

Time for rain! for your long hot dry Autumn  
 Had net-worked with brown  
 The white skin of each grape on the bunches, 15  
 Marked like a quail's crown,  
 Those creatures you make such account of,  
 Whose heads,—speckled white  
 Over brown like a great spider's back,  
 As I told you last night,— 20  
 Your mother bites off for her supper.  
 Red-ripe as could be,  
 Pomegranates were chapping and splitting  
 In halves on the tree:  
 And betwixt the loose walls of great flintstone, 25  
 Or in the thick dust  
 On the path, or straight out of the rock-side,  
 Wherever could thrust  
 Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower  
 Its yellow face up,

\* First published under the title "England in Italy" in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). In early October, 1844, Browning had wandered over this Plain of Sorrento ("Piano di Sorrento") near Naples, and he mentions it in his letter to Miss Barrett, May 3, 1845.

5. *Scirocco*: the dry, hot, autumn wind from Africa—the oppressive "South Wind" of Norman Douglas' novel by that name.

For the prize were great butterflies fighting,  
 Some five for one cup.  
 So, I guessed, ere I got up this morning,  
 What change was in store,  
 By the quick rustle-down of the quail-nets 35  
 Which woke me before  
 I could open my shutter, made fast  
 With a bough and a stone,  
 And look thro' the twisted dead vine-twigs,  
 Sole lattice that 's known. 40  
 Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net-poles,  
 While, busy beneath,  
 Your priest and his brother tugged at them,  
 The rain in their teeth.  
 And out upon all the flat house-roofs 45  
 Where split figs lay drying  
 The girls took the frails under cover:  
 Nor use seemed in trying  
 To get out the boats and go fishing,  
 For, under the cliff, 50  
 Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind-rock.  
 No seeing our skiff  
 Arrive about noon from Amalfi,  
 —Our fisher arrive,  
 And pitch down his basket before us, 55  
 All trembling alive  
 With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit;  
 You touch the strange lumps,  
 And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner  
 Of horns and of humps, 60  
 Which only the fisher looks grave at,  
 While round him like imps  
 Cling screaming the children as naked  
 And brown as his shrimps;  
 Himself too as bare to the middle 65  
 —You see round his neck  
 The string and its brass coin suspended,  
 That saves him from wreck.  
 But to-day not a boat reached Salerno,  
 So back, to a man,

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47. *Frails*: baskets of rushes, containing figs.

Came our friends, with whose help in the vineyards  
 Grape-harvest began.  
 In the vat, halfway up in our house-side,  
 Like blood the juice spins,  
 While your brother all bare-legged is dancing 75  
 Till breathless he grins  
 Dead-beaten in effort on effort  
 To keep the grapes under,  
 Since still when he seems all but master,  
 In pours the fresh plunder 80  
 From girls who keep coming and going  
 With basket on shoulder,  
 And eyes shut against the rain's driving;  
 Your girls that are older,—  
 For under the hedges of aloe, 85  
 And where, on its bed  
 Of the orchard's black mould, the love-apple  
 Lies pulpy and red,  
 All the young ones are kneeling and filling  
 Their laps with the snails 90  
 Tempted out by this first rainy weather,—  
 Your best of regales,  
 As to-night will be proved to my sorrow,  
 When, supping in state,  
 We shall feast our grape-gleaners (two dozen, 95  
 Three over one plate)  
 With lasagne so tempting to swallow  
 In slippery ropes  
 And gourds fried in great purple slices,  
 That colour of popes. 100  
 Meantime, see the grape bunch they 've brought you:  
 The rain-water slips  
 O'er the heavy blue bloom on each globe  
 Which the wasp to your lips  
 Still follows with fretful persistence: 105  
 Nay, taste, while awake,  
 This half of a curd-white smooth cheese-ball  
 That peels, flake by flake,

87. *Love-apple*: tomato.

97. *Lasagne*: kind of macaroni.

Like an onion, each smoother and whiter;  
 Next, sip this weak wine 110  
 From the thin green glass flask, with its stopper,  
 A leaf of the vine;  
 And end with the prickly-pear's red flesh  
 That leaves thro' its juice  
 The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth. 115  
 Scirocco is loose!  
 Hark, the quick, whistling pelt of the olives  
 Which, thick in one's track,  
 Tempt the stranger to pick up and bite them,  
 Tho' not yet half black! 120  
 How the old twisted olive trunks shudder,  
 The medlars let fall  
 Their hard fruit, and the brittle great fig-trees  
 Snap off, figs and all,  
 For here comes the whole of the tempest! 125  
 No refuge, but creep  
 Back again to my side and my shoulder,  
 And listen or sleep.

O how will your country show next week,  
 When all the vine-boughs 130  
 Have been stripped of their foliage to pasture  
 The mules and the cows?  
 Last eve, I rode over the mountains;  
 Your brother, my guide,  
 Soon left me, to feast on the myrtles 135  
 That offered, each side,  
 Their fruit-balls, black, glossy and luscious,—  
 Or strip from the sorbs  
 A treasure, or, rosy and wondrous,  
 Those hairy gold orbs! 140  
 But my mule picked his sure sober path out,  
 Just stopping to neigh  
 When he recognized down in the valley  
 His mates on their way  
 With the faggots and barrels of water; 145  
 And soon we emerged

From the plain, where the woods could scarce follow;  
 And still as we urged  
 Our way, the woods wondered, and left us,  
 As up still we trudged 150  
 Though the wild path grew wilder each instant,  
 And place was e'en grudged  
 'Mid the rock-chasms and piles of loose stones  
 Like the loose broken teeth  
 Of some monster which climbed there to die 155  
 From the ocean beneath—  
 Place was grudged to the silver-grey fume-weed  
 That clung to the path,  
 And dark rosemary ever a-dying  
 That, 'spite the wind's wrath, 160  
 So loves the salt rock's face to seaward,  
 And lentisks as staunch  
 To the stone where they root and bear berries,  
 And . . . what shows a branch  
 Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets 165  
 Of pale seagreen leaves;  
 Over all trod my mule with the caution  
 Of gleaners o'er sheaves,  
 Still, foot after foot like a lady,  
 Till, round after round, 170  
 He climbed to the top of Calvano,  
 And God's own profound  
 Was above me, and round me the mountains,  
 And under, the sea,  
 And within me my heart to bear witness 175  
 What was and shall be.  
 Oh, heaven and the terrible crystal!  
 No rampart excludes  
 Your eye from the life to be lived  
 In the blue solitudes. 180  
 Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement!  
 Still moving with you;  
 For, ever some new head and breast of them  
 Thrusts into view

162. *Lentisks*: mastic trees.

171. *Calvano*: mountain near Naples. See Browning's letter to Miss Barrett, May 3, 1845.



To observe the intruder; you see it 185  
 If quickly you turn  
 And, before they escape you surprise them.  
 They grudge you should learn  
 How the soft plains they look on, lean over  
 And love (they pretend) 190  
 —Cower beneath them, the flat sea-pine crouches,  
 The wild fruit-trees bend,  
 E'en the myrtle-leaves curl, shrink and shut:  
 All is silent and grave:  
 'T is a sensual and timorous beauty, 195  
 How fair! but a slave.  
 So, I turned to the sea; and there slumbered  
 As greenly as ever  
 Those isles of the siren, your Galli;  
 No ages can sever 200  
 The Three, nor enable their sister  
 To join them,—halfway  
 On the voyage, she looked at Ulysses—  
 No farther to-day,  
 Tho' the small one, just launched in the wave, 205  
 Watches breast-high and steady  
 From under the rock, her bold sister  
 Swum halfway already.  
 Fortù, shall we sail there together  
 And see from the sides 210  
 Quite new rocks show their faces, new haunts  
 Where the siren abides?  
 Shall we sail round and round them, close over  
 The rocks, tho' unseen,  
 That ruffle the grey glassy water 215  
 To glorious green?  
 Then scramble from splinter to splinter,  
 Reach land and explore,  
 On the largest, the strange square black turret  
 With never a door, 220  
 Just a loop to admit the quick lizards;  
 Then, stand there and hear  
 The birds' quiet singing, that tells us  
 What life is, so clear?

199. *Isles of the Siren*: supposed to be those described in the *Odyssey*.

- The secret they sang to Ulysses 225  
 When, ages ago,  
 He heard and he knew this life's secret  
 I hear and I know.
- Ah, see! The sun breaks o'er Calvano;  
 He strikes the great gloom 230  
 And flutters it o'er the mount's summit  
 In airy gold fume.  
 All is over. Look out, see the gipsy,  
 Our tinker and smith,  
 Has arrived, set up bellows and forge, 235  
 And down-squatted forthwith  
 To his hammering, under the wall there;  
 One eye keeps aloof  
 The urchins that itch to be putting  
 His jews'-harps to proof, 240  
 While the other, thro' locks of curled wire,  
 Is watching how sleek  
 Shines the hog, come to share in the windfall  
 —Chew, abbot's own cheek!  
 All is over. Wake up and come out now, 245  
 And down let us go,  
 And see the fine things got in order  
 At church for the show  
 Of the Sacrament, set forth this evening.  
 To-morrow 's the Feast 250  
 Of the Rosary's Virgin, by no means  
 Of Virgins the least,  
 As you'll hear in the off-hand discourse  
 Which (all nature, no art)  
 The Dominican brother, these three weeks, 255  
 Was getting by heart.  
 Not a pillar nor post but is dizen'd  
 With red and blue papers;  
 All the roof waves with ribbons, each altar  
 A-blaze with long tapers; 260  
 But the great masterpiece is the scaffold  
 Rigged glorious to hold

250-251. *The Feast of the Rosary's Virgin*: celebrating the anniversary of the Christian victory over the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto, 1571.

All the fiddlers and fifers and drummers  
 And trumpeters bold,  
 Not afraid of Bellini nor Auber, 265  
 Who, when the priest's hoarse,  
 Will strike us up something that 's brisk  
 For the feast's second course.  
 And then will the flaxen-wigged Image  
 Be carried in pomp 270  
 Thro' the plain, while in gallant procession  
 The priests mean to stomp.  
 All round the glad church lie old bottles  
 With gunpowder stopped,  
 Which will be, when the Image re-enters, 275  
 Religiously popped;  
 And at night from the crest of Calvano  
 Great bonfires will hang,  
 On the plain will the trumpets join chorus,  
 And more poppers bang. 280  
 At all events, come—to the garden  
 As far as the wall;  
 See me tap with a hoe on the plaster  
 Till out there shall fall  
 A scorpion with wide angry nippers! 285  
  
 —"Such trifles!" you say?  
 Fortù, in my England at home,  
 Men meet gravely to-day  
 And debate, if abolishing Corn-laws  
 Be righteous and wise 290  
 —If 't were proper, Scirocco should vanish  
 In black from the skies!

265. Vincenzi Bellini (1802-35), operatic composer; Daniel François Esprit Auber (1782-1871), French composer.

269. *Image*: of the Rosary's Virgin.

289. *Corn-laws*: the tariff on grain that kept up the price of foodstuffs for the benefit of the agricultural interests. After a year of ruined crops, great suffering, and bitter agitation for free-trade, backed especially by the rising industrialists, the Corn Laws were repealed in June, 1846. The agitation was at its height when Browning finished this poem by adding the last section. When Miss Barrett criticized it on August thirteenth, it still lacked this section. In her letter of October twenty-second, 1845, she writes that the end he has added gives unity to the whole. This is one of the few direct references to contemporary politics in Browning's poetry.

JUST FOR A HANDFUL OF SILVER HE LEFT US,  
 JUST FOR A RIBAND TO STICK IN HIS COAT—  
 FOUND THE ONE GIFT OF WHICH FORTUNE BEFRETT US,  
 LOST ALL THE OTHERS SHE LETS US DEVOTE;  
 THEY, WITH THE GOLD TO GIVE, DOLED HIM OUT SILVER,  
 SO MUCH WAS THEIRS WHO SO LITTLE ALLOWED:  
 HOW ALL OUR COPPER HAD GONE FOR HIS SERVICE!  
 RAGS—WERE THEY PURPLE, HIS HEART HAD BEEN PROUD!  
 WE THAT HAD LOVED HIM SO, FOLLOWED HIM, HONOURED HIM,  
 LIVED IN HIS MILD AND MAGNIFICENT EYE,  
 LEARNED HIS GREAT LANGUAGE, CAUGHT HIS CLEAR ACCENTS,  
 MADE HIM OUR PATTERN TO LIVE AND TO DIE!  
 SHAKESPEARE WAS OF US, MILTON WAS FOR US,  
 BURNS, SHELLEY, WERE WITH US,—THEY WATCH FROM THEIR GRAVES!

13. Browning is mistaken; so far as we can see, Shakespeare at his most liberal was never so liberal as Wordsworth at his most conservative. On the other hand, in "House," Browning claims that Shakespeare kept his own opinions hidden completely. In both of these contradictory assumptions Browning is, in general, unsupported by the conclusions of Shakespearean

He alone breaks from the van and the freemen, 15  
 —He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

*structure is in media res → II dramatic action is the present*

We shall march prospering,—not thro' his presence;  
 Songs may inspirit us,—not from his lyre;

Deeds will be done,—while he boasts his quiescence,  
 Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire: 20

Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,  
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,

One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for angels,  
 One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!

Life's night begins: let him never come back to us! 25  
 There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,

Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,  
 Never glad confident morning again!

Best fight on well, for we taught him—strike gallantly,  
 Menace our heart ere we master his own; 30

Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,  
 Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!

## THE LOST MISTRESS\*

### I

ALL's over, then: does truth sound bitter

As one at first believes?

Hark, 't is the sparrows' good-night twitter

About your cottage eaves!

scholarship. Almost all schools of thought in the nineteenth century wished to claim Shakespeare as their own. Liberalism in English literature really begins with Milton.

32. Mrs. Orr says admiringly of the poem, "It breathes a tender regret for the moral injury he [the Leader] has inflicted on himself." But others might consider Browning's conclusion self-righteous.

\* The rejected lover is in the position of Browning himself a few months before the poem appeared. After first meeting Miss Barrett on May 20, 1845, he went home and wrote her a passionate declaration of love. She replied that if he attempted any more reference to the subject, "I will not see you again." Browning resigned himself to saying "what mere friends say." But before the publication of the poem in *Dramatic Romances* on November sixth of that year, even his letters had become more than "a thought stronger." On October twenty-third he had written, "I love you

## II

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,  
 I noticed that, to-day;  
 One day more bursts them open fully  
 —You know the red turns grey. 5

## III

To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest?  
 May I take your hand in mine? 10  
 Mere friends are we,—well, friends the merest  
 Keep much that I resign:

## IV

For each glance of the eye so bright and black,  
 Though I keep with heart's endeavour,—  
 Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back, 15  
 Though it stay in my soul for ever!—

## V

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,  
 Or only a thought stronger;  
 I will hold your hand but as long as all may,  
 Or so very little longer! 20

## HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD\*

## I

OH, to be in England  
 Now that April's there,  
 And whoever wakes in England

because I *love* you; I see you 'once a week' because I cannot see you all day long; I think of you all day long, because I most certainly could not think of you once an hour less . . ." (*Letters* I, 254). She had just seen "The Lost Mistress" in manuscript and criticized it, in her letter of October twenty-second, for being obscure in the fourth stanza. Contrast the humble but genial attitude towards "The Lost Mistress" with the pitying condescension towards "The Lost Leader"—the poem which immediately preceded this in *Dramatic Romances*.

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\* This title originally (in *Dramatic Romances*, 1845) covered three poems, of which this was the first; "Nobly, nobly, Cape St. Vincent" ("Home-Thoughts, from the Sea") the third; and the second "Here's to Nelson's Memory" (later the last poem under "Nationality in Drinks"). Contrast "De Gustibus."

Sees, some morning, unaware,  
 That the lowest boughs and the brush-wood sheaf      5  
 Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,  
 While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough  
 In England—now!

## II

And after April, when May follows,  
 And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!      10  
 Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge  
 Leans to the field and scatters on the clover  
 Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—  
 That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,  
 Lest you should think he never could recapture      15  
 The first fine careless rapture!  
 And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,  
 All will be gay when noontide wakes anew  
 The buttercups, the little children's dower  
 —Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!      20

## HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA\*

NOBLY, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the North-west died  
 away;  
 Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay;  
 Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;  
 In the dimmest North-east distance dawned Gibraltar grand  
 and gray;  
 "Here and here did England help me: how can I help  
 England?"—say,      5  
 Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,  
 While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

\* In *Dramatic Romances* (1845) this appeared originally as the third poem under "Home-Thoughts, from Abroad." In 1849, when the first poem assumed the general title and the second poem was dropped, this was given its present title.

1. *Cape Saint Vincent*: the scene of Nelson's victory over the Spanish, February 14, 1797.

3. *Trafalgar*: a cape east of Cadiz Bay, on the southern coast of Spain, where Nelson won his great naval victory over the French and Spanish (October 21, 1805) and lost his life. Cf. "Here's to Nelson's Memory" under "Nationality in Drinks."

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT  
SAINT PRAXED'S CHURCH\*

ROME, 15—

VANITY, saith the preacher, vanity!  
 Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?  
 Nephews—sons mine . . . ah God, I know not! Well—  
 She, men would have to be your mother once,  
 Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was! 5  
 What 's done is done, and she is dead beside,  
 Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,  
 And as she died so must we die ourselves,  
 And thence ye may perceive the world 's a dream.  
 Life, how and what is it? As here I lie 10  
 In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,  
 Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask  
 "Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.  
 Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;  
 And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought 15  
 With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:  
 —Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;  
 Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South  
 He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!  
 Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence 20

\* This appeared first, under the title "The Tomb at St. Praxed's," in *Hood's Magazine*, March, 1845, and then in *Dramatic Romances*, in November. In October, 1844, Browning visited, in Rome, the ornate Church of Saint Praxed with its tomb of Cardinal Cetiive. Ruskin writes, "I know of no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit,—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin" (*Modern Painters*, pt. V, sec. 34, *Works*, ed. Cook and Wedderburne, VI, 449). Browning's success in depicting the worldly churchmen of the Renaissance has often been pointed out, but the chief Browning commentators have given less attention to the relation between this poem and the pseudo-religious estheticism that was to be an important current in the decadence of the *fin de siècle*, best represented by Walter Pater. Elizabeth Barrett in her letter to Browning, July 21, 1845, says of this grotesque-tragic poem that it is "indeed full of the power of life . . . and of death" (*Letters*, I, 134).

1. Cf. Ecclesiastes, i, 2.

14. A church in Rome named in honour of St. Praxed (S. Prassede), virgin daughter of a Roman senator of the first century.



One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,  
 And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,  
 And up into the aery dome where live  
 The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk:  
 And I shall fill my slab of basalt there, 25  
 And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,  
 With those nine columns round me, two and two,  
 The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:  
 Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe  
 As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse. 30  
 —Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,  
 Put me where I may look at him! True peach,  
 Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!  
 Draw close: that conflagration of my church  
 —What then? So much was saved if aught were missed! 35  
 My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig  
 The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,  
 Drop water gently till the surface sink,  
 And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I! . . .  
 Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft, 40  
 And corded up in a tight olive-frail,  
 Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,  
 Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,  
 Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .  
 Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all, 45  
 That brave Frascati villa with its bath,  
 So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,  
 Like God the Father's globe on both his hands  
 Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,  
 For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst! 50  
 Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:  
 Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?

21. *Epistle-side*: the right side (as one faces the altar) where the epistle is read at the Mass.

26. *Tabernacle*: the canopy.

31. *Onion-stone*: inferior grade of marble (onion-colored) that peels off in layers.

41. *Olive-frail*: olive basket.

42. *Lapis lazuli*: a semi-precious blue stone.

46. *Frascati*: beautiful suburb of Rome.

49. *Jesu Church* (Il Jesu) is the Jesuit church in Rome.

51. *Cf.* Job, vii, 6.

Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black—  
 'T was ever antique-black I meant! How else  
 Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath? 55  
 The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,  
 Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance  
 Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,  
 The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,  
 Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan 60  
 Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,  
 And Moses with the tables . . . but I know  
 Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,  
 Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope  
 To revel down my villas while I gasp 65  
 Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine  
 Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!  
 Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then!  
 'T is jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve  
 My bath must needs be left behind, alas! 70  
 One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,  
 There 's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—  
 And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray  
 Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,  
 And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs? 75  
 —That 's if ye carve my epitaph aright,  
 Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,  
 No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—

58. *Thyrsus*: staff carried in Bacchanalian festivals in honor of the God of Wine. Browning is laughing at the unconscious irony in this mixture of utterly incompatible pagan and Christian elements, so common in the Renaissance.

62. *Cf.* Exodus, xxiv-xxxvi.

68. *Jasper*: a green stone with red spots. Ruskin says that this poem illustrates "one of those phases of local human character which, though belonging to Shakespere's own age, he never noticed, because it was specially Italian and un-English. . . . I mean the kind of admiration with which a southern artist regarded the *stone* he worked in; and the pride which populace or priest took in the possession of precious mountain substance, worked into the pavements of their cathedrals, and the shafts of their tombs" (*Modern Painters*, pt. V, sec. 32, vi, 447).

77. *Tully*: Marcus Tullius Cicero. As the Renaissance degenerated (first in Italy), men of superficial culture were more interested in imitating Cicero's pure Latin style than in reviving Classical wisdom.

Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!  
 And then how I shall lie through centuries, 80  
 And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,  
 And see God made and eaten all day long,  
 And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste  
 Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!  
 For as I lie here, hours of the dead night, 85  
 Dying in state and by such slow degrees,  
 I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,  
 And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,  
 And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop  
 Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work: 90  
 And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts  
 Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,  
 About the life before I lived this life,  
 And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,  
 Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount, 95  
 Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,  
 And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,  
 And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,  
 —Aha, *ELUCESCEBAT* quoth our friend!  
 No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best! 100  
 Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.  
 All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope  
 My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?  
 Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,  
 They glitter like your mother's for my soul, 105  
 Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,  
 Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase  
 With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,

79. Domitius Ulpian (170–228 A.D.) was a Roman jurist of the period when Latin no longer had the Classical purity of Cicero's age.

82. A reference to the Sacrament of the Mass.

84. The thoroughgoing materialism of the Bishop's conception of Eternal Life shows the depth of his worldliness.

89. *Mortcloth*: funeral pall.

95. Compare line 59. The dying man is confusing Christ and St. Praxed (a woman).

99. *Elucescebat*: "he was illustrious" (in decadent Latin—Classical Latin would say "*elucebat*").

101. Cf. Job, xiv, 1

108. *Term*: a bust on a pedestal such as the Romans erected for their god Terminus.

And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx  
 That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down, 110  
 To comfort me on my entablature  
 Whereon I am to lie till I must ask  
 "Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!  
 For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude  
 To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone— 115  
 Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat  
 As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—  
 And no more *lapis* to delight the world!  
 Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,  
 But in a row: and, going, turn your backs 120  
 —Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,  
 And leave me in my church, the church for peace,  
 That I may watch at leisure if he leers—  
 Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,  
 As still he envied me, so fair she was! 125

## GARDEN FANCIES\*

## I. THE FLOWER'S NAME

## I

HERE's the garden she walked across,  
 Arm in my arm, such a short while since:  
 Hark, now I push its wicket, the moss  
 Hinders the hinges and makes them wince!  
 She must have reached this shrub ere she turned, 5  
 As back with that murmur the wicket swung;  
 For she laid the poor snail, my chance foot spurned,  
 To feed and forget it the leaves among.

## II

Down this side of the gravel-walk  
 She went while her robe's edge brushed the box: 10

116. *Gritstone*: a coarse sandstone.

\* These two poems appeared in *Hood's Magazine*, July, 1844, and in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). (In 1863 the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" was put with them as "Garden Fancies No. III," but it was separated again in 1868.) Probably in both poems the garden is that of Browning's mother at Hatcham, New Cross, Surrey—the garden that was to supply roses for Miss Barrett when the poet fell in love with her a few months after the publication of these "Garden Fancies."

And here she paused in her gracious talk  
 To point me a moth on the milk-white phlox.  
 Roses, ranged in valiant row,  
 I will never think that she passed you by!  
 She loves you noble roses, I know; 15  
 But yonder, see, where the rock-plants lie!

## III

This flower she stopped at, finger on lip,  
 Stooped over, in doubt, as settling its claim;  
 Till she gave me, with pride to make no slip,  
 Its soft meandering Spanish name: 20  
 What a name! Was it love or praise?  
 Speech half-asleep or song half-awake?  
 I must learn Spanish, one of these days,  
 Only for that slow sweet name's sake.

## IV

Roses, if I live and do well, 25  
 I may bring her, one of these days,  
 To fix you fast with as fine a spell,  
 Fit you each with his Spanish phrase;  
 But do not detain me now; for she lingers  
 There, like sunshine over the ground, 30  
 And ever I see her soft white fingers  
 Searching after the bud she found.

## V

Flower, you Spaniard, look that you grow not,  
 Stay as you are and beloved for ever!  
 Bud, if I kiss you 't is that you blow not: 35  
 Mind, the shut pink mouth opens never!  
 For while it pouts, her fingers wrestle,  
 Twinkling the audacious leaves between,  
 Till round they turn and down they nestle—  
 Is not the dear mark still to be seen? 40

16. This line was at first (in *Hood's Magazine*):

But this—so surely this met her eye!

20. It is not known to what flower Browning refers.

## VI

Where I find her not, beauties vanish;  
 Whither I follow her, beauties flee;  
 Is there no method to tell her in Spanish  
 June's twice June since she breathed it with me?  
 Come, bud, show me the least of her traces, 45  
 Treasure my lady's lightest footfall!  
 —Ah, you may flout and turn up your faces—  
 Roses, you are not so fair after all!

## II. SIBRANDUS SCHAFNABURGENSIS\*

## I

Plague take all your pedants, say I!  
 He who wrote what I hold in my hand,  
 Centuries back was so good as to die,  
 Leaving this rubbish to cumber the land;  
 This, that was a book in its time, 5  
 Printed on paper and bound in leather,  
 Last month in the white of a matin-prime  
 Just when the birds sang all together.

## II

Into the garden I brought it to read,  
 And under the arbute and laurustine 10  
 Read it, so help me grace in my need,  
 From title-page to closing line.  
 Chapter on chapter did I count,  
 As a curious traveller counts Stonehenge;  
 Added up the mortal amount; 15  
 And then proceeded to my revenge.

43-44. When Browning wrote these lines he had never been in love, according to his letters to Miss Barrett (*Letters*, I, 205, and II, 159); but he was at least in love with the idea of falling in love.

\* See note to general title at head of preceding poem. Browning takes Sibrandus of Aschafenburg as a typical pedant. This incident happened in the garden of Browning's mother. In a letter to Miss Barrett, January 5, 1846, Browning confesses to his "odd liking for 'vermin.'" He had a pet spider that lived "in the jaws of a great scull, whence he watched me as I wrote" (*Letters*, I, 28).

7. *Matin-prime*: early morning hour.

## III

Yonder 's a plum-tree with a crevice  
 An owl would build in, were he but sage;  
 For a lap of moss, like a fine pont-levis  
 In a castle of the Middle Age, 20  
 Joins to a lip of gum, pure amber;  
 When he 'd be private, there might he spend  
 Hours alone in his lady's chamber:  
 Into this crevice I dropped our friend.

## IV

Splash, went he, as under he ducked, 25  
 —At the bottom, I knew, rain-drippings stagnate:  
 Next, a handful of blossoms I plucked  
 To bury him with, my bookshelf's magnate;  
 Then I went in-doors, brought out a loaf,  
 Half a cheese, and a bottle of Chablis; 30  
 Lay on the grass and forgot the oaf  
 Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais.

## V

Now, this morning, betwixt the moss  
 And gum that locked our friend in limbo,  
 A spider had spun his web across, 35  
 And sat in the midst with arms akimbo:  
 So, I took pity, for learning's sake,  
 And, *de profundis, accentibus lætis*,  
*Cantate!* quoth I, as I got a rake;  
 And up I fished his delectable treatise. 40

## VI

Here you have it, dry in the sun,  
 With all the binding all of a blister,

19. *Pont-levis*: drawbridge.

30. *Chablis*: a white wine from the region of Chablis in France.

32. Browning contrasts with this pedant the great Renaissance French author of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Rabelais, one of Browning's favorites. Humorous, learned, grotesque, realistic, Rabelais probably exercised an influence on Browning's style.

38-39. Latin for "from the depths, with joyous accents, sing."

And great blue spots where the ink has run,  
 And reddish streaks that wink and glister  
 O'er the page so beautifully yellow: 45  
 Oh, well have the droppings played their tricks!  
 Did he guess how toadstools grow, this fellow?  
 Here 's one stuck in his chapter six!

## VII

How did he like it when the live creatures  
 Ticked and toused and browsed him all over, 50  
 And worm, slug, eft, with serious features,  
 Came in, each one, for his right of trover?  
 —When the water-beetle with great blind deaf face  
 Made of her eggs the stately deposit,  
 And the newt borrowed just so much of the preface 55  
 As tiled in the top of his black wife's closet?

## VIII

All that life and fun and romping,  
 All that frisking and twisting and coupling,  
 While slowly our poor friend's leaves were swamping  
 And clasps were cracking and covers suppling! 60  
 As if you had carried sour John Knox  
 To the play-house at Paris, Vienna or Munich,  
 Fastened him into a front-row box,  
 And danced off the ballet with trousers and tunic.

## IX

Come, old martyr! What, torment enough is it? 65  
 Back to my room shall you take your sweet self.  
 Good-bye, mother-beetle; husband-eft, *sufficit!*  
 See the snug niche I have made on my shelf!  
 A.'s book shall prop you up, B.'s shall cover you,  
 Here's C. to be grave with, or D. to be gay, 70  
 And with E. on each side, and F. right over you,  
 Dry-rot at ease till the Judgment-day!

52. *Right of trover*: the discoverer's right to a treasure.

61. John Knox (1505-72), Scotch Calvinist leader of the Reformation in Scotland. Both Browning and Miss Barrett were of Calvinistic origin. She reproached him for holding up John Knox to derision here.

67. *Sufficit*: "it is sufficient."



## THE LABORATORY\*

## ANCIEN RÉGIME

## I

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,  
 May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,  
 As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—  
 Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

## II

He is with her, and they know that I know 5  
 Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow  
 While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear  
 Empty church, to pray God in, for them!—I am here.

## III

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,  
 Pound at thy powder,—I am not in haste! 10  
 Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,  
 Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

## IV

That in the mortar—you call it a gum?  
 Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!  
 And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue, 15  
 Sure to taste sweetly,—is that poison too?

## V

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,  
 What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!  
 To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,  
 A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket! 20

---

\* This appeared first in *Hood's Magazine*, June, 1844, and then with "The Confessional" under the general title "France and Spain" in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). Dante Gabriel Rossetti's first water-color was an illustration of this poem.

## VI

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give,  
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!  
But to light a pastile, and Elise, with her head  
And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

## VII

Quick—it is finished? The colour 's too grim! 25  
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?  
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,  
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

## VIII

What a drop! She 's not little, no minion like me!  
That 's why she ensnared him: this never will free 30  
The soul from those masculine eyes,—say, “no!”  
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

## IX

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought  
My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought  
Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall 35  
Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does it all!

## X

Not that I bid you spare her the pain;  
Let death be felt and the proof remain:  
Brand, burn up, bite into its grace—  
He is sure to remember her dying face! 40

## XI

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose;  
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:  
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee!  
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

## XII

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill, 45  
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!  
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings  
Ere I know it—next moment I dance at the King's!

## THE CONFESSIONAL\*

[SPAIN]

## I

It is a lie—their Priests, their Pope,  
 Their Saints, their . . . all they fear or hope  
 Are lies, and lies—there! through my door  
 And ceiling, there! and walls and floor,  
 There, lies, they lie—shall still be hurled 5  
 Till spite of them I reach the world!

## II

You think Priests just and holy men!  
 Before they put me in this den  
 I was a human creature too,  
 With flesh and blood like one of you, 10  
 A girl that laughed in beauty's pride  
 Like lilies in your world outside.

## III

I had a lover—shame avaunt!  
 This poor wrenched body, grim and gaunt,  
 Was kissed all over till it burned, 15  
 By lips the truest, love e'er turned  
 His heart's own tint: one night they kissed  
 My soul out in a burning mist.

## IV

So, next day when the accustomed train  
 Of things grew round my sense again, 20  
 "That is a sin," I said: and slow  
 With downcast eyes to church I go,  
 And pass to the confession-chair,  
 And tell the old mild father there.

## V

But when I falter Beltran's name, 25  
 "Ha?" quoth the father; "much I blame

---

\* In *Dramatic Romances* (1845) this was published with "The Laboratory" under the general title "France and Spain." The poem may have reference to the period of the Spanish Inquisition. Whatever the date of the action, Browning probably had in mind the Spain and Italy of his own day.

The sin; yet wherefore idly grieve?  
Despair not—strenuously retrieve!  
Nay, I will turn this love of thine  
To lawful love, almost divine; 30

## VI

“For he is young, and led astray,  
This Beltran, and he schemes, men say,  
To change the laws of church and state;  
So, thine shall be an angel’s fate,  
Who, ere the thunder breaks, should roll 35  
Its cloud away and save his soul.

## VII

“For, when he lies upon thy breast,  
Thou mayest demand and be possessed  
Of all his plans, and next day steal  
To me, and all those plans reveal, 40  
That I and every priest, to purge  
His soul, may fast and use the scourge.”

## VIII

That father’s beard was long and white,  
With love and truth his brow seemed bright;  
I went back, all on fire with joy, 45  
And, that same evening, bade the boy  
Tell me, as lovers should, heart-free,  
Something to prove his love of me.

## IX

He told me what he would not tell  
For hope of heaven or fear of hell; 50  
And I lay listening in such pride!  
And, soon as he had left my side,  
Tripped to the church by morning-light  
To save his soul in his despite.

## X

I told the father all his schemes, 55  
Who were his comrades, what their dreams;  
“And now make haste,” I said, “to pray

The one spot from his soul away;  
 To-night he comes, but not the same  
 Will look!" At night he never came. 60

## XI

Nor next night: on the after-morn,  
 I went forth with a strength new-born.  
 The church was empty; something drew  
 My steps into the street; I knew  
 It led me to the market-place: 65  
 Where, lo, on high, the father's face!

## XII

That horrible black scaffold dressed,  
 That stapled block . . . God sink the rest!  
 That head strapped back, that blinding vest,  
 Those knotted hands and naked breast, 70  
 Till near one busy hangman pressed,  
 And, on the neck these arms caressed . . .

## XIII

No part in aught they hope or fear!  
 No heaven with them, no hell!—and here,  
 No earth, not so much space as pens 75  
 My body in their worst of dens  
 But shall bear God and man my cry,  
 Lies—lies, again—and still, they lie!

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS\*

## I

You'RE my friend:  
 I was the man the Duke spoke to;  
 I helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke, too:  
 So, here's the tale from beginning to end,  
 My friend! 5

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\* The first nine sections appeared in *Hood's Magazine*, April, 1845. Then the magazine was discontinued. The whole was published in *Dramatic Romances*, November 6, 1845. Browning wrote to Dr. Furnivall (April 15, 1883) that the idea of this poem grew out of a line in a song he heard a woman singing when he was a boy, *Following the Queen of the Gypsies*, O (*Letters*, ed. Hood, p. 217). Dulwich Wood, near Browning's

## II

Ours is a great wild country:  
 If you climb to our castle's top,  
 I don't see where your eye can stop;  
 For when you've passed the cornfield country,  
 Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed, 10  
 And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,  
 And cattle-tract to open-chase,  
 And open-chase to the very base  
 Of the mountain where, at a funeral pace,  
 Round about, solemn and slow, 15  
 One by one, row after row,  
 Up and up the pine-trees go,  
 So, like black priests up, and so  
 Down the other side again  
 To another greater, wilder country, 20

home, was a favorite haunt of gypsies. The situation and character of the Duchess are much the same as in "My Last Duchess," and perhaps Browning was also thinking of the tyranny Miss Barrett was being subjected to in her home. He wrote her (July 25, 1845) that he first intended the poem to consist entirely of the gypsy's description of the life the lady was to lead with her gypsy lover, "a *real* life, not an unreal one like that with the Duke." The poem would have told of "all their wild adventures," while the "insignificance" of her former life would have been merely inferred. But Browning was less interested in telling a romantic story than in making a psychological study, and this became the main subject of the poem. Arnold's *Scholar Gipsy* also uses a flight to the gypsies as an escape from "unreal" conventional life; a comparison as to what the flight is *toward* brings out the difference between the two poets. Browning's is at once a romantic tale and a realistic dramatic monologue, giving the psychology not only of the Duchess but also of the huntsman who is speaking. Notice his contempt for the fake antique of romantic fashions with their idealization of the Middle Ages. To him feudalism is a practical way of life, and he takes for granted the feudal virtues of loyalty and hardiness. He expresses himself naturally in the language of hunting, the chief feudal sport. We see the difference between a living tradition and an antiquarian imitation of the forms of the past. The scene is Central Europe, where feudalism was more vital than elsewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century. Browning passed through south-west Germany in 1834 and in 1838.

On November 15, 1845, Elizabeth Barrett says the rhythm of this poem strikes her as something new, something "between metre and prose." Earlier, Browning had submitted the poem to her for criticism and accepted her suggestions for improvement, saying (July 25), "wherever was a bud, even, in that strip of May-bloom, a live musical bee hangs now." (*Letters* I, 277, 138.)

That's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,  
 Branched through and through with many a vein  
 Whence iron's dug, and copper's dealt;

Look right, look left, look straight before,—  
 Beneath they mine, above they smelt, 25

Copper-ore and iron-ore,  
 And forge and furnace mould and melt,  
 And so on, more and ever more,  
 Till at the last, for a bounding belt,  
 Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore 30  
 —And the whole is our Duke's country.

## III

I was born the day this present Duke was—

(And O, says the song, ere I was old!)

In the castle where the other Duke was—

(When I was happy and young, not old!) 35

I in the kennel, he in the bower:

We are of like age to an hour.

My father was huntsman in that day;

Who has not heard my father say

That, when a boar was brought to bay, 40

Three times, four times out of five,

With his huntspear he'd contrive

To get the killing-place transfix'd,

And pin him true, both eyes betwixt?

And that's why the old Duke would rather 45

He lost a salt-pit than my father,

And loved to have him ever in call;

That's why my father stood in the hall

When the old Duke brought his infant out

To show the people, and while they passed 50

The wondrous bantling round about,

Was first to start at the outside blast

As the Kaiser's courier blew his horn

Just a month after the babe was born.

"And," quoth the Kaiser's courier, "since 55

The Duke has got an heir, our Prince

Needs the Duke's self at his side:"

The Duke looked down and seemed to wince,

But he thought of wars o'er the world wide,

Castles a-fire, men on their march, 60  
 The toppling tower, the crashing arch;  
 And up he looked, and awhile he eyed  
 The row of crests and shields and banners  
 Of all achievements after all manners,  
 And "ay," said the Duke with a surly pride. 65  
 The more was his comfort when he died  
 At next year's end, in a velvet suit,  
 With a gilt glove on his hand, his foot  
 In a silken shoe for a leather boot,  
 Petticoated like a herald, 70  
 In a chamber next to an ante-room,  
 Where he breathed the breath of page and groom,  
 What he called stink, and they, perfume:  
 —They should have set him on red Berold  
 Mad with pride, like fire to manage! 75  
 They should have got his cheek fresh tannage  
 Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine!  
 Had they stuck on his fist a rough-foot merlin!  
 (Hark, the wind's on the heat at its game!  
 Oh for a noble falcon-lanner 80  
 To flap each broad wing like a banner,  
 And turn in the wind, and dance like flame!)  
 Had they broached a white-beer cask from Berlin  
 —Or if you incline to prescribe mere wine  
 Put to his lips, when they saw him pine, 85  
 A cup of our own Moldavia fine,  
 Cotnar for instance, green as May sorrel  
 And ropy with sweet,—we shall not quarrel.

## IV

So, at home, the sick tall yellow Duchess  
 Was left with the infant in her clutches, 90  
 She being the daughter of God knows who:  
 And now was the time to revisit her tribe.  
 Abroad and afar they went, the two,  
 And let our people rail and gibe  
 At the empty hall and extinguished fire, 95  
 As loud as we liked, but ever in vain,

78. *Merlin*: species of hawk used in hunting.

80. *Falcon-lanner*: a long-tailed hawk.



Till after long years we had our desire,  
And back came the Duke and his mother again.

## V

And he came back the pertest little ape  
That ever affronted human shape; 100  
Full of his travel, struck at himself.

You'd say, he despised our bluff old ways?  
—Not he! For in Paris they told the elf  
Our rough North land was the Land of Lays,  
The one good thing left in evil days; 105

Since the Mid-Age was the Heroic Time,  
And only in wild nooks like ours  
Could you taste of it yet as in its prime,  
And see true castles, with proper towers,  
Young-hearted women, old-minded men, 110  
And manners now as manners were then.

So, all that the old Dukes had been, without knowing it,  
This Duke would fain know he was, without being it;  
'T was not for the joy's self, but the joy of his showing it,  
Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our seeing it, 115  
He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out,  
The souls of them fumed-forth, the hearts of them torn-out:  
And chief in the chase his neck he perilled  
On a lathy horse, all legs and length,  
With blood for bone, all speed, no strength; 120  
—They should have set him on red Berold  
With the red eye slow consuming in fire,  
And the thin stiff ear like an abbey-spire!

## VI

Well, such as he was, he must marry, we heard:  
And out of a convent, at the word, 125  
Came the lady, in time of spring.  
—Oh, old thoughts they cling, they cling!  
That day, I know, with a dozen oaths

104. Most of Germany, Bohemia, and Poland lies north of Paris. Compare also Walter Scott's romantic treatment of North Britain (Scotland, *etc.*) in prose fiction and in poems like *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. For all of this the huntsman has contempt, since to him, as to Shakespeare's Hotspur, or to many Southern planters before the Civil War, the feudal way of life was simply reality, not romance.

I clad myself in thick hunting-clothes  
Fit for the chase of urochs or buffle 130  
In winter-time when you need to muffle.  
But the Duke had a mind we should cut a figure,  
And so we saw the lady arrive:  
My friend, I have seen a white crane bigger!  
She was the smallest lady alive, 135  
Made in a piece of nature's madness,  
Too small, almost, for the life and gladness  
That over-filled her, as some hive  
Out of the bears' reach on the high trees  
Is crowded with its safe merry bees: 140  
In truth, she was not hard to please!  
Up she looked, down she looked, round at the mead,  
Straight at the castle, that's best indeed  
To look at from outside the walls:  
As for us, styled the "serfs and thralls," 145  
She as much thanked me as if she had said it,  
(With her eyes, do you understand?)  
Because I patted her horse while I led it;  
And Max, who rode on her other hand,  
Said, no bird flew past but she inquired 150  
What its true name was, nor ever seemed tired—  
If that was an eagle she saw hover,  
And the green and grey bird on the field was the plover.  
When suddenly appeared the Duke:  
And as down she sprung, the small foot pointed 155  
On to my hand,—as with a rebuke,  
And as if his backbone were not jointed,  
The Duke stepped rather aside than forward,  
And welcomed her with his grandest smile;  
And, mind you, his mother all the while 160  
Chilled in the rear, like a wind to Nor'ward;  
And up, like a weary yawn, with its pulleys  
Went, in a shriek, the rusty portcullis;  
And, like a glad sky the north-wind sullies,  
The lady's face stopped its play, 165  
As if her first hair had grown grey;  
For such things must begin some one day.

## VII

In a day or two she was well again;  
 As who should say, "You labour in vain!  
 This is all a jest against God, who meant  
 I should ever be, as I am, content  
 And glad in his sight; therefore, glad I will be."  
 So, smiling as at first went she. 170

## VIII

She was active, stirring, all fire—  
 Could not rest, could not tire— 175  
 To a stone she might have given life!  
 (I myself loved once, in my day)  
 —For a shepherd's, miner's, huntsman's wife,  
 (I had a wife, I know what I say)  
 Never in all the world such an one! 180  
 And here was plenty to be done,  
 And she that could do it, great or small,  
 She was to do nothing at all.  
 There was already this man in his post,  
 This in his station, and that in his office, 185  
 And the Duke's plan admitted a wife, at most,  
 To meet his eye, with the other trophies,  
 Now outside the hall, now in it,  
 To sit thus, stand thus, see and be seen,  
 At the proper place in the proper minute, 190  
 And die away the life between.  
 And it was amusing enough, each infraction  
 Of rule—(but for after-sadness that came)  
 To hear the consummate self-satisfaction  
 With which the young Duke and the old dame 195  
 Would let her advise, and criticise,  
 And, being a fool, instruct the wise,  
 And, child-like, parcel out praise or blame:  
 They bore it all in complacent guise,  
 As though an artificer, after contriving 200  
 A wheel-work image as if it were living,  
 Should find with delight it could motion to strike him!  
 So found the Duke, and his mother like him:  
 The lady hardly got a rebuff—  
 That had not been contemptuous enough, 205

With his cursed smirk, as he nodded applause,  
And kept off the old mother-cat's claws.

## IX

So, the little lady grew silent and thin,  
Paling and ever paling,  
As the way is with a hid chagrin; 210  
And the Duke perceived that she was ailing,  
And said in his heart, "'T is done to spite me,  
But I shall find in my power to right me!"  
Don't swear, friend! The old one, many a year,  
Is in hell, and the Duke's self . . . you shall hear. 215

## X

Well, early in autumn, at first winter-warning,  
When the stag had to break with his foot, of a morning,  
A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice  
That covered the pond till the sun, in a trice,  
Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold, 220  
And another and another, and faster and faster,  
Till, dimpling to blindness, the wide water rolled:  
Then it so chanced that the Duke our master  
Asked himself what were the pleasures in season,  
And found, since the calendar bade him be hearty, 225  
He should do the Middle Age no treason  
In resolving on a hunting-party.  
Always provided, old books showed the way of it!  
What meant old poets by their strictures?  
And when old poets had said their say of it, 230  
How taught old painters in their pictures?  
We must revert to the proper channels,  
Workings in tapestry, paintings on panels,  
And gather up woodcraft's authentic traditions:  
Here was food for our various ambitions, 235  
As on each case, exactly stated—  
To encourage your dog, now, the properest chirrup,  
Or best prayer to Saint Hubert on mounting your stirrup—  
We of the household took thought and debated.  
Blessed was he whose back ached with the jerkin 240

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238. *St. Hubert*: patron saint of hunting.

His sire was wont to do forest-work in;  
 Blessedder he who nobly sunk "ohs"  
 And "ahs" while he tugged on his grandsire's trunk-hose;  
 What signified hats if they had no rims on,  
     Each slouching before and behind like the scallop,      245  
     And able to serve at sea for a shallop,  
 Loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson?  
 So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme on 't,  
     What with our Venerers, Prickers and Verderers,  
     Might hope for real hunters at length and not murderers,      250  
 And oh the Duke's tailor, he had a hot time on 't!

## XI

Now you must know that when the first dizziness  
     Of flap-hats and buff-coats and jack-boots subsided,  
     The Duke put this question, "The Duke's part provided,  
 Had not the Duchess some share in the business?"      255  
 For out of the mouth of two or three witnesses  
 Did he establish all fit-or-unfitnesses:  
 And, after much laying of heads together,  
 Somebody's cap got a notable feather  
 By the announcement with proper unction      260  
 That he had discovered the lady's function;  
 Since ancient authors gave this tenet,  
     "When horns wind a mort and the deer is at siege,  
 Let the dame of the castle prick forth on her jennet,  
     And, with water to wash the hands of her liege      265  
 In a clean ewer with a fair towelling,  
 Let her preside at the disembowelling."  
 Now, my friend, if you had so little religion  
     As to catch a hawk, some falcon-lanner,  
     And thrust her broad wings like a banner      270  
 Into a coop for a vulgar pigeon;  
 And if day by day and week by week  
     You cut her claws, and sealed her eyes,  
 And clipped her wings, and tied her beak,  
     Would it cause you any great surprise      275

246. *Shallop*: kind of boat.

249. With our huntsmen, light-horsemen, and guardians of the venison.

263. *Wind a mort*: sound at the death of the deer.

273. *Sealed her eyes*: closed them (term in falconry).

If, when you decided to give her an airing,  
You found she needed a little preparing?  
—I say, should you be such a curmudgeon,  
If she clung to the perch, as to take it in dudgeon?  
Yet when the Duke to his lady signified, 280  
Just a day before, as he judged most dignified,  
In what a pleasure she was to participate,—  
And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,  
Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,  
As if pressed by fatigue even he could not dissipate, 285  
And duly acknowledged the Duke's forethought,  
But spoke of her health, if her health were worth aught,  
Of the weight by day and the watch by night,  
And much wrong now that used to be right,  
So, thanking him, declined the hunting,— 290  
Was conduct ever more affronting?  
With all the ceremony settled—  
With the towel ready, and the sewer  
Polishing up his oldest ewer,  
And the jennet pitched upon, a piebald, 295  
Black-barred, cream-coated and pink eye-balled,—  
No wonder if the Duke was nettled!  
And when she persisted nevertheless,—  
Well, I suppose here's the time to confess  
That there ran half round our lady's chamber 300  
A balcony none of the hardest to clamber;  
And that Jacynth the tire-woman, ready in waiting,  
Stayed in call outside, what need of relating?  
And since Jacynth was like a June rose, why, a fervent  
Adorer of Jacynth of course was your servant; 305  
And if she had the habit to peep through the casement,  
How could I keep at any vast distance?  
And so, as I say, on the lady's persistence,  
The Duke, dumb-stricken with amazement,  
Stood for a while in a sultry smother, 310  
And then, with a smile that partook of the awful,  
Turned her over to his yellow mother  
To learn what was held decorous and lawful;  
And the mother smelt blood with a cat-like instinct,

As her cheek quick whitened thro' all its quince-tinct. 315  
Oh, but the lady heard the whole truth at once!

What meant she?—Who was she?—Her duty and station,  
The wisdom of age and the folly of youth, at once,

Its decent regard and its fitting relation—  
In brief, my friend, set all the devils in hell free 320

And turn them out to carouse in a belfry  
And treat the priests to a fifty-part canon,  
And then you may guess how that tongue of hers ran on!  
Well, somehow or other it ended at last  
And, licking her whiskers, out she passed; 325

And after her,—making (he hoped) a face

Like Emperor Nero or Sultan Saladin,  
Stalked the Duke's self with the austere grace

Of ancient hero or modern paladin,  
From door to staircase—oh such a solemn 330  
Unbending of the vertebral column!

## XII

However, at sunrise our company mustered;

And here was the huntsman bidding unkennel,  
And there 'neath his bonnet the pricker blustered,

With feather dank as a bough of wet fennel; 335

For the court-yard walls were filled with fog

You might have cut as an axe chops a log—

Like so much wool for colour and bulkiness;

And out rode the Duke in a perfect sulkiness,  
Since, before breakfast, a man feels but queasily, 340

And a sinking at the lower abdomen

Begins the day with indifferent omen.

And lo, as he looked around uneasily,

The sun ploughed the fog up and drove it asunder

This way and that from the valley under; 345

And, looking through the court-yard arch,

Down in the valley, what should meet him

But a troop of Gipsies on their march?

No doubt with the annual gifts to greet him.

322. *Fifty-part canon*: "A canon, in music, is a piece wherein the subject is repeated in various keys: and being strictly in the repetition becomes the 'canon'—the imperative law—to what follows. Fifty of such parts would be indeed a notable peal: to manage three is enough of an achievement for a good musician" (note by Browning).

## XIII

Now, in your land, Gipsies reach you, only 350  
After reaching all lands beside;  
North they go, South they go, trooping or lonely,  
And still, as they travel far and wide,  
Catch they and keep now a trace here, a trace there,  
That puts you in mind of a place here, a place there. 355  
But with us, I believe they rise out of the ground,  
And nowhere else, I take it, are found  
With the earth-tint yet so freshly embrowned:  
Born, no doubt, like insects which breed on  
The very fruit they are meant to feed on. 360  
For the earth—not a use to which they don't turn it,  
The ore that grows in the mountain's womb,  
Or the sand in the pits like a honeycomb,  
They sift and soften it, bake it and burn it—  
Whether they weld you, for instance, a snaffle 365  
With side-bars never a brute can baffle;  
Or a lock that's a puzzle of wards within wards;  
Or, if your colt's fore-foot inclines to curve inwards,  
Horseshoes they hammer which turn on a swivel  
And won't allow the hoof to shrivel. 370  
Then they cast bells like the shell of the winkle  
That keep a stout heart in the ram with their tinkle;  
But the sand—they pinch and pound it like otters;  
Commend me to Gipsy glass-makers and potters!  
Glasses they'll blow you, crystal-clear, 375  
Where just a faint cloud of rose shall appear,  
As if in pure water you dropped and let die  
A bruised black-blooded mulberry;  
And that other sort, their crowning pride,  
With long white threads distinct inside, 380  
Like the lake-flower's fibrous roots which dangle  
Loose such a length and never tangle,  
Where the bold sword-lily cuts the clear waters,  
And the cup-lily couches with all the white daughters  
Such are the works they put their hand to, 385  
The uses they turn and twist iron and sand to.  
And these made the troop, which our Duke saw sally

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371. *Winkle*: periwinkle, a spiral mollusk.



Toward his castle from out of the valley,  
 Men and women, like new-hatched spiders,  
 Come out with the morning to greet our riders. 390  
 And up they wound till they reached the ditch,  
 Whereat all stopped save one, a witch  
 That I knew, as she hobbled from the group,  
 By her gait directly and her stoop,  
 I, whom Jacynth was used to importune 395  
 To let that same witch tell us our fortune.  
 The oldest Gipsy then above ground;  
 And, sure as the autumn season came round,  
 She paid us a visit for profit or pastime,  
 And every time, as she swore, for the last time. 400  
 And presently she was seen to sidle  
 Up to the Duke till she touched his bridle,  
 So that the horse of a sudden reared up  
 As under its nose the old witch peered up  
 With her worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes 405  
 Of no use now but to gather brine,  
 And began a kind of level whine  
 Such as they used to sing to their viols  
 When their ditties they go grinding  
 Up and down with nobody minding: 410  
 And then, as of old, at the end of the humming  
 Her usual presents were forthcoming  
 —A dog-whistle blowing the fiercest of trebles,  
 (Just a sea-shore stone holding a dozen fine pebbles,)  
 Or a porcelain mouth-piece to screw on a pipe-end,— 415  
 And so she awaited her annual stipend.  
 But this time, the Duke would scarcely vouchsafe  
 A word in reply; and in vain she felt  
 With twitching fingers at her belt  
 For the purse of sleek pine-martin pelt, 420  
 Ready to put what he gave in her pouch safe,—  
 Till, either to quicken his apprehension,  
 Or possibly with an after-intention,  
 She was come, she said, to pay her duty  
 To the new Duchess, the youthful beauty. 425  
 No sooner had she named his lady,  
 Than a shine lit up the face so shady,

And its smirk returned with a novel meaning—  
 For it struck him, the babe just wanted weaning;  
 If one gave her a taste of what life was and sorrow, 430  
 She, foolish to-day, would be wiser to-morrow;  
 And who so fit a teacher of trouble  
 As this sordid crone bent well-nigh double?  
 So, glancing at her wolf-skin vesture,  
 (If such it was, for they grow so hirsute 435  
 That their own fleece serves for natural fur-suit)  
 He was contrasting, 't was plain from his gesture,  
 The life of the lady so flower-like and delicate  
 With the loathsome squalor of this helicat.  
 I, in brief, was the man the Duke beckoned 440  
 From out of the throng, and while I drew near  
 He told the crone—as I since have reckoned  
 By the way he bent and spoke into her ear  
 With circumspection and mystery—  
 The main of the lady's history, 445  
 Her frowardness and ingratitude:  
 And for all the crone's submissive attitude  
 I could see round her mouth the loose plaits tightening,  
 And her brow with assenting intelligence brightening,  
 As though she engaged with hearty goodwill 450  
 Whatever he now might enjoin to fulfil,  
 And promised the lady a thorough frightening.  
 And so, just giving her a glimpse  
 Of a purse, with the air of a man who imps  
 The wing of the hawk that shall fetch the hernshaw, 455  
 He bade me take the Gipsy mother  
 And set her telling some story or other  
 Of hill or dale, oak-wood or fernshaw,  
 To wile away a weary hour  
 For the lady left alone in her bower, 460  
 Whose mind and body craved exertion  
 And yet shrank from all better diversion.

439. *Helicat*: hell-cat or witch.

454-5. *Imps the wing*: inserts new feathers in the place of broken ones in the wing.

455. *Hernshaw*: heron.

458. *Fernshaw*: fern thicket.

## XIV

Then clapping heel to his horse, the mere curveter,  
 Out rode the Duke, and after his hollo  
 Horses and hounds swept, huntsman and servitor, 465  
 And back I turned and bade the crone follow.  
 And what makes me confident what's to be told you  
 Had all along been of this crone's devising,  
 Is, that, on looking round sharply, behold you,  
 There was a novelty quick as surprising: 470  
 For first, she had shot up a full head in stature,  
 And her step kept pace with mine nor faltered,  
 As if age had foregone its usurpature,  
 And the ignoble mien was wholly altered,  
 And the face looked quite of another nature, 475  
 And the change reached too, whatever the change meant,  
 Her shaggy wolf-skin cloak's arrangement:  
 For where its tatters hung loose like sedges,  
 Gold coins were glittering on the edges,  
 Like the band-roll strung with tomans 480  
 Which proves the veil a Persian woman's:  
 And under her brow, like a snail's horns newly  
 Come out as after the rain he paces,  
 Two unmistakable eye-points duly  
 Live and aware looked out of their places. 485  
 So, we went and found Jacynth at the entry  
 Of the lady's chamber standing sentry;  
 I told the command and produced my companion,  
 And Jacynth rejoiced to admit any one,  
 For since last night, by the same token, 490  
 Not a single word had the lady spoken:  
 They went in both to the presence together,  
 While I in the balcony watched the weather.

## XV

And now, what took place at the very first of all  
 I cannot tell, as I never could learn it: 495  
 Jacynth constantly wished a curse to fall  
 On that little head of hers and burn it  
 If she knew how she came to drop so soundly

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480. *Band-roll*: small ornamental streamer; *tomans*: Persian gold coins.

Asleep of a sudden and there continue  
 The whole time sleeping as profoundly 500  
 As one of the boars my father would pin you  
 'Twixt the eyes where life holds garrison,  
 —Jacynth forgive me the comparison!  
 But where I begin my own narration  
 Is a little after I took my station 505  
 To breathe the fresh air from the balcony,  
 And, having in those days a falcon eye,  
 To follow the hunt thro' the open country,  
 From where the bushes thinlier crested  
 The hillocks, to a plain where's not one tree. 510  
 When, in a moment, my ear was arrested  
 By—was it singing, or was it saying,  
 Or a strange musical instrument playing  
 In the chamber?—and to be certain  
 I pushed the lattice, pulled the curtain, 515  
 And there lay Jacynth asleep,  
 Yet as if a watch she tried to keep,  
 In a rosy sleep along the floor  
 With her head against the door;  
 While in the midst, on the seat of state, 520  
 Was a queen—the Gipsy woman late,  
 With head and face downbent  
 On the lady's head and face intent:  
 For, coiled at her feet like a child at ease,  
 The lady sat between her knees, 525  
 And o'er them the lady's clasped hands met,  
 And on those hands her chin was set,  
 And her upturned face met the face of the crone  
 Wherein the eyes had grown and grown  
 As if she could double and quadruple 530  
 At pleasure the play of either pupil  
 —Very like, by her hands' slow fanning,  
 As up and down like a gor-crow's flappers  
 They moved to measure, or bell clappers.  
 I said, "Is it blessing, is it banning, 535  
 Do they applaud you or burlesque you—  
 Those hands and fingers with no flesh on?"

533. *Gor-crow*: carrion crow.

535. *Banning*: cursing.

But, just as I thought to spring in to the rescue,  
At once I was stopped by the lady's expression:  
For it was life her eyes were drinking 540  
From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,  
—Life's pure fire received without shrinking,  
Into the heart and breast whose heaving  
Told you no single drop they were leaving,  
—Life, that filling her, passed redundant 545  
Into her very hair, back swerving  
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,  
As her head thrown back showed the white throat curving;  
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,  
Moving to the mystic measure, 550  
Bounding as the bosom bounded.  
I stopped short, more and more confounded,  
As still her cheeks burned and eyes glistened,  
As she listened and she listened:  
When all at once a hand detained me, 555  
The selfsame contagion gained me,  
And I kept time to the wondrous chime,  
Making out words and prose and rhyme,  
Till it seemed that the music furl'd  
Its wings like a task fulfilled, and dropped 560  
From under the words it first had propped,  
And left them midway in the world:  
Word took word as hand takes hand,  
I could hear at last, and understand,  
And when I held the unbroken thread, 565  
The Gipsy said:—  
“And so at last we find my tribe.  
And so I set thee in the midst,  
And to one and all of them describe  
What thou saidst and what thou didst, 570  
Our long and terrible journey through,  
And all thou art ready to say and do  
In the trials that remain:  
I trace them the vein and the other vein  
That meet on thy brow and part again, 575  
Making our rapid mystic mark;  
And I bid my people prove and probe

Each eye's profound and glorious globe  
Till they detect the kindred spark  
In those depths so dear and dark, 580  
Like the spots that snap and burst and flee,  
Circling over the midnight sea.  
And on that round young cheek of thine  
I make them recognize the tinge,  
As when of the costly scarlet wine 585  
They drip so much as will impinge  
And spread in a thinnest scale afloat  
One thick gold drop from the olive's coat  
Over a silver plate whose sheen  
Still thro' the mixture shall be seen. 590  
For so I prove thee, to one and all,  
Fit, when my people ope their breast,  
To see the sign, and hear the call,  
And take the vow, and stand the test  
Which adds one more child to the rest— 595  
When the breast is bare and the arms are wide  
And the world is left outside.  
For there is probation to decree,  
And many and long must the trials be  
Thou shalt victoriously endure, 600  
If that brow is true and those eyes are sure;  
Like a jewel-finder's fierce assay  
Of the prize he dug from its mountain-tomb—  
Let once the vindicating ray  
Leap out amid the anxious gloom, 605  
And steel and fire have done their part  
And the prize falls on its finder's heart;  
So, trial after trial past,  
Wilt thou fall at the very last  
Breathless, half in trance 610  
With the thrill of the great deliverance,  
Into our arms for evermore;  
And thou shalt know, those arms once curled  
About thee, what we knew before,  
How love is the only good in the world. 615  
Henceforth be loved as heart can love,

Or brain devise, or hand approve!  
Stand up, look below,  
It is our life at thy feet we throw  
To step with into light and joy; 620  
Not a power of life but we employ  
To satisfy thy nature's want;  
Art thou the tree that props the plant,  
Or the climbing plant that seeks the tree—  
Canst thou help us, must we help thee? 625  
If any two creatures grew into one,  
They would do more than the world has done:  
Though each apart were never so weak,  
Ye vainly through the world should seek  
For the knowledge and the might 630  
Which in such union grew their right:  
So, to approach at least that end,  
And blend,—as much as may be, blend  
Thee with us or us with thee,—  
As climbing plant or propping tree, 635  
Shall some one deck thee, over and down  
Up and about, with blossoms and leaves?  
Fix his heart's fruit for thy garland-crown,  
Cling with his soul as the gourd-vine cleaves,  
Die on thy boughs and disappear 640  
While not a leaf of thine is sere?  
Or is the other fate in store,  
And art thou fitted to adore,  
To give thy wondrous self away,  
And take a stronger nature's sway? 645  
I foresee and could foretell  
Thy future portion, sure and well:  
But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,  
Let them say what thou shalt do!  
Only be sure thy daily life, 650  
In its peace or in its strife,  
Never shall be unobserved;  
We pursue thy whole career,  
And hope for it, or doubt, or fear,—  
Lo, hast thou kept thy path or swerved, 655  
We are beside thee in all thy ways,  
With our blame, with our praise,

Our shame to feel, our pride to show,  
Glad, angry—but indifferent, no!  
Whether it be thy lot to go, 660  
For the good of us all, where the haters meet  
In the crowded city's horrible street;  
Or thou step alone through the morass  
Where never sound yet was  
Save the dry quick clap of the stork's bill, 665  
For the air is still, and the water still,  
When the blue breast of the dipping coot  
Dives under, and all is mute.  
So, at the last shall come old age,  
Decrepit as befits that stage; 670  
How else wouldst thou retire apart  
With the hoarded memories of thy heart,  
And gather all to the very least  
Of the fragments of life's earlier feast,  
Let fall through eagerness to find 675  
The crowning dainties yet behind?  
Ponder on the entire past  
Laid together thus at last,  
When the twilight helps to fuse  
The first fresh with the faded hues, 680  
And the outline of the whole,  
As round eve's shades their framework roll,  
Grandly fronts for once thy soul.  
And then as, 'mid the dark, a gleam  
Of yet another morning breaks, 685  
And like the hand which ends a dream,  
Death, with the might of his sunbeam,  
Touches the flesh and the soul awakes,  
Then——”  
Ay, then indeed something would happen!  
But what? For here her voice changed like a bird's; 690  
There grew more of the music and less of the words;  
Had Jacynth only been by me to clap pen  
To paper and put you down every syllable  
With those clever clerkly fingers,  
All I've forgotten as well as what lingers 695  
In this old brain of mine that's but ill able  
To give you even this poor version



Of the speech I spoil, as it were, with stammering  
 —More fault of those who had the hammering  
 Of prosody into me and syntax, 700  
 And did it, not with hobnails but tintacks!  
 But to return from this excursion,—  
 Just, do you mark, when the song was sweetest,  
 The peace most deep and the charm completest,  
 There came, shall I say, a snap— 705  
 And the charm vanished!  
 And my sense returned, so strangely banished,  
 And, starting as from a nap,  
 I knew the crone was bewitching my lady,  
 With Jacynth asleep; and but one spring made I 710  
 Down from the casement, round to the portal,  
 Another minute and I had entered,—  
 When the door opened, and more than mortal  
 Stood, with a face where to my mind centered  
 All beauties I ever saw or shall see, 715  
 The Duchess: I stopped as if struck by palsy.  
 She was so different, happy and beautiful,  
 I felt at once that all was best,  
 And that I had nothing to do, for the rest,  
 But wait her commands, obey and be dutiful. 720  
 Not that, in fact, there was any commanding;  
 I saw the glory of her eye,  
 And the brow's height and the breast's expanding,  
 And I was hers to live or to die.  
 As for finding what she wanted, 725  
 You know God Almighty granted  
 Such little signs should serve wild creatures  
 To tell one another all their desires,  
 So that each knows what his friend requires,  
 And does its bidding without teachers. 730  
 I preceded her; the crone  
 Followed silent and alone;  
 I spoke to her, but she merely jabbered  
 In the old style; both her eyes had slunk  
 Back to their pits; her stature shrunk; 735  
 In short, the soul in its body sunk  
 Like a blade sent home to its scabbard.  
 We descended, I preceding;

Crossed the court with nobody heeding;  
 All the world was at the chase, 740  
 The courtyard like a desert-place,  
 The stable emptied of its small fry;  
 I saddled myself the very palfrey  
 I remember patting while it carried her,  
 The day she arrived and the Duke married her. 745  
 And, do you know, though it's easy deceiving  
 One's self in such matters, I can't help believing  
 The lady had not forgotten it either,  
 And knew the poor devil so much beneath her  
 Would have been only too glad for her service 750  
 To dance on hot ploughshares like a Turk dervise,  
 But, unable to pay proper duty where owning it,  
 Was reduced to that pitiful method of showing it:  
 For though the moment I began setting  
 His saddle on my own nag of Berold's begetting, 755  
 (Not that I meant to be obtrusive)  
 She stopped me, while his rug was shifting,  
 By a single rapid finger's lifting,  
 And, with a gesture kind but conclusive,  
 And a little shake of the head, refused me,— 760  
 I say, although she never used me,  
 Yet when she was mounted, the Gipsy behind her,  
 And I ventured to remind her,  
 I suppose with a voice of less steadiness  
 Than usual, for my feeling exceeded me, 765  
 —Something to the effect that I was in readiness  
 Whenever God should please she needed me,—  
 Then, do you know, her face looked down on me  
 With a look that placed a crown on me,  
 And she felt in her bosom,—mark, her bosom— 770  
 And, as a flower-tree drops its blossom,  
 Dropped me . . . ah, had it been a purse  
 Of silver, my friend, or gold that's worse,  
 Why, you see, as soon as I found myself  
 So understood,—that a true heart so may gain 775  
 Such a reward,—I should have gone home again,  
 Kissed Jacynth, and soberly drowned myself!  
 It was a little plait of hair  
 Such as friends in a convent make

To wear, each for the other's sake,—  
 This, see, which at my breast I wear,  
 Ever did (rather to Jacynth's grudgment),  
 And ever shall, till the Day of Judgment.  
 And then,—and then,—to cut short,—this is idle,  
 These are feelings it is not good to foster,—  
 I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,  
 And the palfrey bounded,—and so we lost her.

## XVI

When the liquor's out why clink the cannikin?  
 I did think to describe you the panic in  
 The redoubtable breast of our master the mannikin,  
 And what was the pitch of his mother's yellowness,  
 How she turned as a shark to snap the spare-rib  
 Clean off, sailors say, from a pearl-diving Carib,  
 When she heard, what she called the flight of the feloness  
 —But it seems such child's play,  
 What they said and did with the lady away!  
 And to dance on, when we've lost the music,  
 Always made me—and no doubt makes you—sick.  
 Nay, to my mind, the world's face looked so stern  
 As that sweet form disappeared through the postern,  
 She that kept it in constant good humour,  
 It ought to have stopped; there seemed nothing to do more.  
 But the world thought otherwise and went on  
 And my head's one that its spite was spent on:  
 Thirty years are fled since that morning,  
 And with them all my head's adorning.  
 Nor did the old Duchess die outright,  
 As you expect, of suppressed spite,  
 The natural end of every adder  
 Not suffered to empty its poison-bladder:  
 But she and her son agreed, I take it,  
 That no one should touch on the story to wake it,  
 For the wound in the Duke's pride rankled fiery,  
 So, they made no search and small inquiry—  
 And when fresh Gipsies have paid us a visit, I've  
 Noticed the couple were never inquisitive,  
 But told them they're folks the Duke don't want here,  
 And bade them make haste and cross the frontier.

Brief, the Duchess was gone and the Duke was glad of it,  
 And the old one was in the young one's stead, 820  
 And took, in her place, the household's head,  
 And a blessed time the household had of it!  
 And were I not, as a man may say, cautious  
 How I trench, more than needs, on the nauseous,  
 I could favour you with sundry touches 825  
 Of the paint-smutches with which the Duchess  
 Heightened the mellowness of her cheek's yellowness  
 (To get on faster) until at last her  
 Cheek grew to be one master-plaster  
 Of mucus and fucus from mere use of ceruse: 830  
 In short, she grew from scalp to udder  
 Just the object to make you shudder.

## XVII

You're my friend—  
 What a thing friendship is, world without end!  
 How it gives the heart and soul a stir-up 835  
 As if somebody broached you a glorious runlet,  
 And poured out, all lovelily, sparkingly, sunlit,  
 Our green Moldavia, the streaky syrup,  
 Cotnar as old as the time of the Druids—  
 Friendship may match with that monarch of fluids; 840  
 Each supples a dry brain, fills you its ins-and-outs,  
 Give your life's hour-glass a shake when the thin sand doubts  
 Whether to run on or stop short, and guarantees  
 Age is not all made of stark sloth and arrant ease.  
 I have seen my little lady once more, 845  
 Jacynth, the Gipsy, Berold, and the rest of it,  
 For to me spoke the Duke, as I told you before;  
 I always wanted to make a clean breast of it:  
 And now it is made—why, my heart's blood, that went trickle,  
 Trickle, but anon, in such muddy driblets, 850  
 Is pumped up brisk now, through the main ventricle,  
 And genially floats me about the giblets.  
 I'll tell you what I intend to do:  
 I must see this fellow his sad life through—  
 He is our Duke, after all, 855  
 And I, as he says, but a serf and thrall.

---

830. *Fucus*: olive-green algae.

My father was born here, and I inherit  
 His fame, a chain he bound his son with;  
 Could I pay in a lump I should prefer it,  
 But there's no mine to blow up and get done with: 860  
 So, I must stay till the end of the chapter,  
 For, as to our middle-age-manners-adapter,  
 Be it a thing to be glad on or sorry on,  
 Some day or other, his head in a morion  
 And breast in a hauberk, his heels he'll kick up 865  
 Slain by an onslaught fierce of hiccup.  
 And then, when red doth the sword of our Duke rust,  
 And its leathern sheath lie o'ergrown with a blue crust,  
 Then I shall scrape together my earnings;  
 For, you see, in the churchyard Jacynth reposes, 870  
 And our children all went the way of the roses:  
 It's a long lane that knows no turnings.  
 One needs but little tackle to travel in;  
 So, just one stout cloak shall I indue:  
 And for a staff, what beats the javelin 875  
 With which his boars my father pinned you?  
 And then, for a purpose you shall hear presently,  
 Taking some Cotnar, a tight plump skinful,  
 I shall go journeying, who but I, pleasantly!  
 Sorrow is vain and despondency sinful. 880  
 What's a man's age? He must hurry more, that's all;  
 Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to hold:  
 When we mind labour, then only, we're too old—  
 What age had Methusalem when he begat Saul?  
 And at last, as its haven some buffeted ship sees, 885  
 (Come all the way from the north-parts with sperm oil)  
 I hope to get safely out of the turmoil  
 And arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies,  
 And find my lady, or hear the last news of her  
 From some old thief and son of Lucifer, 890  
 His forehead chapleted green with wreathy hop,  
 Sunburned all over like an Æthiop.  
 And when my Cotnar begins to operate  
 And the tongue of the rogue to run at a proper rate,  
 And our wine-skin, tight once, shows each flaccid dent, 895

864. *Morion*: a helmet.865. *Hauberk*: coat of mail.

I shall drop in with—as if by accident—  
 “You never knew, then, how it all ended,  
 What fortune good or bad attended  
 The little lady your Queen befriended?”  
 —And when that’s told me, what’s remaining? 900  
 This world’s too hard for my explaining.  
 The same wise judge of matters equine  
     Who still preferred some slim four-year-old  
     To the big-boned stock of mighty Berold,  
 And, for strong Cotnar, drank French weak wine, 905  
 He also must be such a lady’s scorner!  
     Smooth Jacob still robs homely Esau:  
     Now up, now down, the world’s one see-saw.  
 —So, I shall find out some snug corner  
 Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight, 910  
 Turn myself round and bid the world good night;  
 And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet’s blowing  
     Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)  
 To a world where will be no further throwing  
     Pearls before swine that can’t value them. Amen! 915

## EARTH'S IMMORTALITIES\*

## FAME

SEE, as the prettiest graves will do in time,  
 Our poet’s wants the freshness of its prime;  
 Spite of the sexton’s browsing horse, the sods  
 Have struggled through its binding osier rods;  
 Headstone and half-sunk footstone lean awry, 5  
 Wanting the brick-work promised by-and-by;  
 How the minute grey lichens, plate o’er plate,  
 Have softened down the crisp-cut name and date!

910. *Orson the wood-knight*: “the wild man of the forest,” the terror of France, twin-brother to Valentine, born in the woods and raised by a bear. (French *ourson* means *bear’s cub*.)

\* The title is ironic. Contrast Browning’s humorous mood with the spirit in which Hardy would treat the same theme. When this was first published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845) the two parts were without the explanatory subtitles “Fame” and “Love,” which were added in 1849.

## LOVE

So, the year's done with!  
 (*Love me for ever!*)  
 All March begun with,  
 April's endeavour;  
 May-wreaths that bound me 5  
 June needs must sever;  
 Now snows fall round me,  
 Quenching June's fever—  
 (*Love me for ever!*)

## SONG\*

## I

NAY but you, who do not love her,  
 Is she not pure gold, my mistress?  
 Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her?  
 Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,  
 And this last fairest tress of all, 5  
 So fair, see, ere I let it fall?

## II

Because, you spend your lives in praising;  
 To praise, you search the wide world over:  
 Then why not witness, calmly gazing,  
 If earth holds aught—speak truth—above her? 10  
 Above this tress, and this, I touch  
 But cannot praise, I love so much!

## MEETING AT NIGHT\*\*

## I

THE grey sea and the long black land;  
 And the yellow half-moon large and low;  
 And the startled little waves that leap

---

\* This was published in *Dramatic Romances* on November 6, 1845. On December first, Miss Barrett sent Browning a lock of her hair. In her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, concerning their love affair, sonnet XVIII begins

I never gave a lock of hair away  
 To a man, Dearest, except this to thee.

---

\*\* This poem and the following were first published (in *Dramatic Romances*, 1845), under the general title "Night and Morning," as "I.

In fiery ringlets from their sleep,  
 As I gain the cove with pushing prow,  
 And quench its speed i' the slushy sand. 5

## II

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;  
 Three fields to cross till a farm appears;  
 A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch  
 And blue spurt of a lighted match, 10  
 And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,  
 Than the two hearts beating each to each!

---

 PARTING AT MORNING\*

ROUND the cape of a sudden came the sea,  
 And the sun looked over the mountain's rim:  
 And straight was a path of gold for him,  
 And the need of a world of men for me.

## NATIONALITY IN DRINKS\*\*

## I

My heart sank with our Claret-flask,  
 Just now, beneath the heavy sedges  
 That serves this pond's black face for mask;  
 And still at yonder broken edges  
 O' the hole, where up the bubbles glisten, 5  
 After my heart I look and listen.

Night" and "II. Morning." Browning said that in both poems the man is speaking, and that the first part implies "that such raptures are self-sufficient and enduring," while the second part is a confession of "how fleeting" is that belief.

\* See explanation under preceding poem.

3. *Him* refers to the sun.

\*\* These three poems were first brought together in 1863 with the subtitles "I. Claret," "II. Tokay," "III. Beer." All three appeared in *Dramatic Romances* in 1845, but the third was classified as Number II of "Home-Thoughts, from Abroad." (In the collected edition of 1849 all three were omitted, probably because of the disapproval of Browning's wife.) "Claret and Tokay" had appeared in *Hood's Magazine*, June, 1844. This is another study in the nationally typical: Claret, the French wine, suggests a gay French lady (modern, in contrast to "The Laboratory" of the



## II

Our laughing little flash, compelled  
 Thro' depth to depth more bleak and shady;  
 As when, both arms beside her held,  
 Feet straightened out, some gay French lady 10  
 Is caught up from life's light and motion,  
 And dropped into death's silent ocean!

---

Up jumped Tokay on our table,  
 Like a pygmy castle-warder,  
 Dwarfish to see, but stout and able,  
 Arms and accoutrements all in order;  
 And fierce he looked North, then, wheeling South, 5  
 Blew with his bugle a challenge to Drouth,  
 Cocked his flap-hat with the tosspot-feather,  
 Twisted his thumb in his red moustache,  
 Jingled his huge brass spurs together,  
 Tightened his waist with its Buda sash, 10  
 And then, with an impudence naught could abash,  
 Shrugged his hump-shoulder, to tell the beholder,  
 For twenty such knaves he should laugh but the bolder:  
 And so, with his sword-hilt gallantly jutting,  
 And dexter-hand on his haunch abutting, 15  
 Went the little man, Sir Ausbruch, strutting!

---

Here's to Nelson's memory!  
 'T is the second time that I, at sea,  
 Right off Cape Trafalgar here,  
 Have drunk it deep in British Beer.  
 Nelson for ever—any time 5  
 Am I his to command in prose or rhyme!

---

*Ancien Régime*); Tokay, the Hungarian wine, is "a pygmy castle-warder"; British beer is drunk to the memory of England's naval hero who won the Battle of Trafalgar against Napoleon's fleet in 1805.

10. *Buda*: ancient capital of Hungary.

16. *Sir Ausbruch* originally read "from Ausbruch."

1-3. Browning passed Trafalgar the second time in late August, 1844. See "Home-Thoughts from the Sea," a companion poem.

Give me of Nelson only a touch,  
 And I save it, be it little or much:  
 Here's one our Captain gives, and so  
 Down at the word, by George, shall it go! 10  
 He says that at Greenwich they point the beholder  
 To Nelson's coat, "still with tar on the shoulder:  
 For he used to lean with one shoulder digging,  
 Jigging, as it were, and zig-zag-zigging  
 Up against the mizen-rigging!" 15

## TIME'S REVENGES\*

I've a Friend, over the sea;  
 I like him, but he loves me.  
 It all grew out of the books I write;  
 They find such favour in his sight  
 That he slaughters you with savage looks 5  
 Because you don't admire my books.  
 He does himself though,—and if some vein  
 Were to snap to-night in this heavy brain,  
 To-morrow month, if I lived to try,  
 Round should I just turn quietly, 10  
 Or out of the bedclothes stretch my hand  
 Till I found him, come from his foreign land  
 To be my nurse in this poor place,  
 And make my broth and wash my face  
 And light my fire and, all the while, 15  
 Bear with his old good-humoured smile  
 That I told him "Better have kept away  
 Than come and kill me, night and day,  
 With, worse than fever throbs and shoots,  
 The creaking of his clumsy boots." 20  
 I am as sure that this he would do,

11. Nelson's coat was to be seen in the museum at Greenwich, near Browning's home. Nelson had lost an arm at Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

\* The title is from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, V, i, 384: "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." The situation is imaginary, but DeVane thinks Browning is doing a "fancy portrait" of his friend Domett. (*Browning Handbook*, p. 162.) "Time's Revenges" was published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). Compare Hardy's poems on ironic situations.

As that Saint Paul's is striking two.  
 And I think I rather . . . woe is me!  
 —Yes, rather would see him than not see,  
 If lifting a hand could seat him there 25  
 Before me in the empty chair  
 To-night, when my head aches indeed,  
 And I can neither think nor read  
 Nor make these purple fingers hold  
 The pen; this garret 's freezing cold! 30

And I 've a Lady—there he wakes,  
 The laughing fiend and prince of snakes  
 Within me, at her name, to pray  
 Fate send some creature in the way  
 Of my love for her, to be down-torn, 35  
 Upthrust and outward-borne  
 So I might prove myself that sea  
 Of passion which I needs must be!  
 Call my thoughts false and my fancies quain  
 And my style infirm and its figures faint, 40  
 All the critics say, and more blame yet,  
 And not one angry word you get.  
 But, please you, wonder I would put  
 My cheek beneath that lady's foot  
 Rather than trample under mine 45  
 The laurels of the Florentine,  
 And you shall see how the devil spends  
 A fire God gave for other ends!  
 I tell you, I stride up and down  
 This garret, crowned with love's best crown, 50  
 And feasted with love's perfect feast,  
 To think I kill for her, at least,  
 Body and soul and peace and fame,  
 Alike youth's end and manhood's aim,  
 —So is my spirit, as flesh with sin, 55  
 Filled full, eaten out and in  
 With the face of her, the eyes of her,

46. *The Florentine*: Dante.

54-5. The lines read, originally,

As all my genius, all my learning  
 Leave me, where there's no returning.

The lips, the little chin, the stir  
 Of shadow round her mouth; and she  
 —I 'll tell you,—calmly would decree 60  
 That I should roast at a slow fire,  
 If that would compass her desire  
 And make her one whom they invite  
 To the famous ball to-morrow night.

There may be heaven; there must be hell; 65  
 Meantime, there is our earth here—well!

## THE GLOVE\*

(PETER RONSARD *loquitur*)

"HEIGHO!" yawned one day King Francis,  
 "Distance all value enhances!  
 When a man's busy, why, leisure  
 Strikes him as wonderful pleasure:  
 'Faith, and at leisure once is he? 5  
 Straightway he wants to be busy.  
 Here we've got peace; and aghast I'm  
 Caught thinking war the true pastime.  
 Is there a reason in metre?  
 Give us your speech, master Peter!" 10  
 I who, if mortal dare say so,  
 Ne'er am at loss with my Naso,  
 "Sire," I replied, "joys prove cloudlets:  
 Men are the merest Ixions"—  
 Here the King whistled aloud, "Let's 15

\* Based on Leigh Hunt's poem, "The Glove and the Lion;" which condemns the lady, Browning's poem of course makes out a case for her. His own experience as a lover lies behind his chivalric interpretation of her motive, an interpretation, as Elizabeth Barrett told him, so plainly Browning's that women should all be grateful. (*Letters*, I, 261). It appeared in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). Peter Ronsard, French poet of the sixteenth century, is speaking (*loquitur*).

1. Francis I, King of France at the beginning of the sixteenth century, patron of poets and artists.

12. *Naso*: Ovid, the Roman poet (43 B.C.—18 A.D.), author of the *Metamorphoses*.

14. Ixion was bound to a constantly turning wheel in Hades for presuming to love Hera, queen of the gods.

—Heigho—go look at our lions!”  
 Such are the sorrowful chances  
 If you talk fine to King Francis.

And so, to the courtyard proceeding  
 Our company, Francis was leading, 20  
 Increased by new followers tenfold  
 Before he arrived at the penfold;  
 Lords, ladies, like clouds which bedizen  
 At sunset the western horizon.  
 And Sir De Lorge pressed 'mid the foremost 25  
 With the dame he professed to adore most.  
 Oh, what a face! One by fits eyed  
 Her, and the horrible pitside;  
 For the penfold surrounded a hollow  
 Which led where the eye scarce dared follow, 30  
 And shelved to the chamber secluded  
 Where Bluebeard, the great lion, brooded.  
 The King hailed his keeper, an Arab  
 As glossy and black as a scarab,  
 And bade him make sport and at once stir 35  
 Up and out of his den the old monster.  
 They opened a hole in the wire-work  
 Across it, and dropped there a firework,  
 And fled: one's heart's beating redoubled;  
 A pause, while the pit's mouth was troubled, 40  
 The blackness and silence so utter,  
 By the firework's slow sparkling and sputter;  
 Then earth in a sudden contortion  
 Gave out to our gaze her abortion.  
 Such a brute! Were I friend Clement Marot 45  
 (Whose experience of nature's but narrow,  
 And whose faculties move in no small mist  
 When he versifies David the Psalmist)  
 I should study that brute to describe you  
*Illum Juda Leonem de Tribu.* 50  
 One's whole blood grew curdling and creepy

34. *Scarab*: a large beetle.

45. Clement Marot (1496–1544), French poet who wrote paraphrases of the Psalms.

50. "That lion of the tribe of Judah."

To see the black mane, vast and heapy,  
 The tail in the air stiff and straining,  
 The wide eyes, nor waxing nor waning,  
 As over the barrier which bounded  
 His platform, and us who surrounded 55  
 The barrier, they reached and they rested  
 On space that might stand him in best stead:  
 For who knew, he thought, what the amazement,  
 The eruption of clatter and blaze meant, 60  
 And if, in this minute of wonder,  
 No outlet, 'mid lightning and thunder,  
 Lay broad, and, his shackles all shivered,  
 The lion at last was delivered?  
 Ay, that was the open sky o'erhead! 65  
 And you saw by the flash on his forehead,  
 By the hope in those eyes wide and steady,  
 He was leagues in the desert already,  
 Driving the flocks up the mountain,  
 Or catlike couched hard by the fountain 70  
 To waylay the date-gathering negress:  
 So guarded he entrance or egress.  
 "How he stands!" quoth the King: "we may well swear,  
 (No novice, we've won our spurs elsewhere  
 And so can afford the confession,) 75  
 We exercise wholesome discretion  
 In keeping aloof from his threshold,  
 Once hold you, those jaws want no fresh hold,  
 Their first would too pleasantly purloin  
 The visitor's brisket or surloin: 80  
 But who's he would prove so fool-hardy?  
 Not the best man of Marignan, pardie!"  
 The sentence no sooner was uttered,  
 Than over the rails a glove fluttered,  
 Fell close to the lion, and rested: 85  
 The dame 't was, who flung it and jested  
 With life so, De Lorge had been wooing  
 For months past; he sat there pursuing  
 His suit, weighing out with nonchalance  
 Fine speeches like gold from a balance. 90

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82. *Marignan*: Marignano, a town in northern Italy, where Francis had won a great victory in 1515.

Sound the trumpet, no true knight's a tarrier!  
 De Lorge made one leap at the barrier,  
 Walked straight to the glove,—while the lion  
 Ne'er moved, kept his far-reaching eye on  
 The palm-tree-edged desert-spring's sapphire, 95  
 And the musky oiled skin of the Kaffir,—  
 Picked it up, and as calmly retreated,  
 Leaped back where the lady was seated,  
 And full in the face of its owner  
 Flung the glove.

“Your heart's queen, you dethrone her? 100  
 So should I!”—cried the King—“'t was mere vanity,  
 Not love, set that task to humanity!”  
 Lords and ladies alike turned with loathing  
 From such a proved wolf in sheep's clothing.

Not so, I; for I caught an expression 105  
 In her brow's undisturbed self-possession  
 Amid the Court's scoffing and merriment,  
 As if from no pleasing experiment  
 She rose, yet of pain not much heedful  
 So long as the process was needful,— 110  
 As if she had tried in a crucible,  
 To what “speeches like gold” were reducible,  
 And, finding the finest prove copper,  
 Felt the smoke in her face was but proper;  
 To know what she had *not* to trust to, 115  
 Was worth all the ashes and dust too.  
 She went out 'mid hooting and laughter;  
 Clement Marot stayed; I followed after,  
 And asked, as a grace, what it all meant?  
 If she wished not the rash deed's recalcment? 120  
 “For I”—so I spoke—“am a poet:  
 Human nature,—behooves that I know it!”

She told me, “Too long had I heard  
 Of the deed proved alone by the word:  
 For my love—what De Lorge would not dare!  
 With my scorn—what De Lorge could compare! 125

And the endless descriptions of death  
 He would brave when my lip formed a breath,  
 I must reckon as braved, or, of course,  
 Doubt his word—and moreover, perforce, 130  
 For such gifts as no lady could spurn,  
 Must offer my love in return.

When I looked on your lion, it brought  
 All the dangers at once to my thought,  
 Encountered by all sorts of men, 135  
 Before he was lodged in his den,—

From the poor slave whose club or bare hands  
 Dug the trap, set the snare on the sands,  
 With no King and no Court to applaud,  
 By no shame, should he shrink overawed, 140  
 Yet to capture the creature made shift,  
 That his rude boys might laugh at the gift,  
 —To the page who last leaped o'er the fence

Of the pit, on no greater pretence  
 Than to get back the bonnet he dropped, 145  
 Lest his pay for a week should be stopped.

So, wiser I judged it to make  
 One trial what 'death for my sake'  
 Really meant, while the power was yet mine,  
 Than to wait until time should define 150  
 Such a phrase not so simply as I,  
 Who took it to mean just 'to die.'

The blow a glove gives is but weak:  
 Does the mark yet discolour my cheek?  
 But when the heart suffers a blow, 155  
 Will the pain pass so soon, do you know?"

I looked, as away she was sweeping,  
 And saw a youth eagerly keeping  
 As close as he dared to the doorway.  
 No doubt that a noble should more weigh 160  
 His life than befits a plebeian;  
 And yet, had our brute been Nemean—  
 (I judge by a certain calm fervour  
 The youth stepped with, forward to serve her)

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162. The slaying of the Nemean lion was one of the twelve labors of Hercules.



—He'd have scarce thought you did him the worst turn 165  
 If you whispered, "Friend, what you'd get, first earn!"  
 And when, shortly after, she carried  
 Her shame from the Court, and they married,  
 To that marriage some happiness, maugre  
 The voice of the Court, I dared augur. 170

For De Lorge, he made women with men vie,  
 Those in wonder and praise, these in envy;  
 And in short stood so plain a head taller  
 That he wooed and won . . . how do you call her?  
 The beauty, that rose in the sequel 175  
 To the King's love, who loved her a week well.  
 And 't was noticed he never would honour  
 De Lorge (who looked daggers upon her)  
 With the easy commission of stretching  
 His legs in the service, and fetching 180  
 His wife, from her chamber, those straying  
 Sad gloves she was always mislaying,  
 While the King took the closet to chat in,—  
 But of course this adventure came pat in.  
 And never the King told the story, 185  
 How bringing a glove brought such glory,  
 But the wife smiled—"His nerves are grown firmer:  
 Mine he brings now and utters no murmur."

*Venienti occurrite morbo!*  
 With which moral I drop my theorbo. 190

## CHRISTMAS EVE\*

### I

Out of the little chapel I burst  
 Into the fresh night-air again.  
 Five minutes full, I waited first  
 In the doorway, to escape the rain

189. "Go to meet the coming ills."

190. *Theorbo*: a stringed instrument, to which Ronsard has been singing this poem.

\* This poem, appearing in *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day*, 1850, portrays graphically, in extreme form, the three kinds of Christianity that were most

|  |    |
|--|----|
| That drove in gusts down the common's centre         | 5  |
| At the edge of which the chapel stands,              |    |
| Before I plucked up heart to enter.                  |    |
| Heaven knows how many sorts of hands                 |    |
| Reached past me, groping for the latch               |    |
| Of the inner door that hung on catch                 | 10 |
| More obstinate the more they fumbled,                |    |
| Till, giving way at last with a scold                |    |
| Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled           |    |
| One sheep more to the rest in fold,                  |    |
| And left me irresolute, standing sentry              | 15 |
| In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,           |    |
| Six feet long by three feet wide,                    |    |
| Partitioned off from the vast inside—                |    |
| I blocked up half of it at least.                    |    |
| No remedy; the rain kept driving.                    | 20 |
| They eyed me much as some wild beast,                |    |
| That congregation, still arriving,                   |    |
| Some of them by the main road, white                 |    |
| A long way past me into the night,                   |    |
| Skirting the common, then diverging;                 | 25 |
| Not a few suddenly emerging                          |    |
| From the common's self thro' the paling-gaps,        |    |
| —They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,              |    |
| Where the road stops short with its safeguard border |    |

prominent during the last two centuries: the Evangelical Protestant (now often called Fundamentalist); the Catholic; and the Rationalistic (or ultra-Modernist). Here, moreover, Browning first formulated his own religious views, and in all his later elaborations of his ideas he did not alter his main conclusions. This was the first of Browning's books, except *Strafford*, to be printed at the publisher's expense, and it is the only poetry he published during the first nine years of his married life. Tennyson's chief religious poem, *In Memoriam*, was also published in 1850.

The extreme Protestants are represented in "Christmas Eve" by the Dissenters or Non-Conformists whose meeting the poet paints in the most unattractive colors (portraying the traits Arnold ascribes to them) in order to say that even at its worst Browning prefers Dissent. He was not only brought up in a Non-Conformist family, but lived in the middle class suburb Camberwell, the very center of Non-Conformity. The influence of Elizabeth Barrett was all in the same direction, for she too attended an Independent (Congregational) Chapel. But in spite of his Protestant prejudices, Browning has drawn with great power the rapture of the Catholic worshipper at the miracle of the Mass of Christmas.

Of lamps, as tired of such disorder;— 30  
 But the most turned in yet more abruptly  
     From a certain squalid knot of alleys,  
 Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,  
     Which now the little chapel rallies  
 And leads into day again,—its priestliness 35  
 Lending itself to hide their beastliness  
 So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),  
 And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on  
 Those neophytes too much in lack of it,  
     That, where you cross the common as I did, 40  
     And meet the party thus presided,  
 "Mount Zion" with Love-lane at the back of it,  
 They front you as little disconcerted  
 As, bound for the hills, her fate averted,  
 And her wicked people made to mind him, 45  
 Lot might have marched with Gomorrah behind him.

## II

Well, from the road, the lanes or the common,  
 In came the flock: the fat weary woman,  
 Panting and bewildered, down-clapping  
     Her umbrella with a mighty report, 50  
 Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,  
     A wreck of whalebones; then, with a snort,  
 Like a startled horse, at the interloper  
 (Who humbly knew himself improper,  
 But could not shrink up small enough) 55  
 —Round to the door, and in,—the gruff  
 Hinge's invariable scold  
 Making my very blood run cold.  
 Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered  
 On broken clogs, the many-tattered 60  
 Little old-faced peaking sister-turned-mother  
 Of the sickly babe she tried to smother  
 Somehow up, with its spotted face,  
 From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place;  
 She too must stop, wring the poor ends dry 65  
 Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby

46. See Genesis, xix, 17 and 30.

Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping  
 Already from my own clothes' dropping,  
 Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on:  
 Then, stooping down to take off her pattens, 70  
 She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,  
 Planted together before her breast  
 And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.  
 Close on her heels, the dingy satins  
 Of a female something past me flitted, 75  
 With lips as much too white, as a streak  
 Lay far too red on each hollow cheek;  
 And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied  
 All that was left of a woman once,  
 Holding at least its tongue for the nonce. 80  
 Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,  
 With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,  
 And eyelids screwed together tight,  
 Led himself in by some inner light.  
 And, except from him, from each that entered, 85  
 I got the same interrogation—  
 "What, you the alien, you have ventured  
 To take with us, the elect, your station?  
 A carer for none of it, a Gallio!"—  
 Thus, plain as print, I read the glance 90  
 At a common prey, in each countenance  
 As of huntsman giving his hounds the tallyho.  
 And, when the door's cry drowned their wonder,  
 The draught, it always sent in shutting,  
 Made the flame of the single tallow candle 95  
 In the cracked square lantern I stood under,  
 Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting  
 As it were, the luckless cause of scandal:  
 I verily fancied the zealous light  
 (In the chapel's secret, too!) for spite 100  
 Would shudder itself clean off the wick,  
 With the airs of a Saint John's Candlestick.

81. *Penitent Thief*: cf. Luke, xxiii, 40.

89. "And Gallio cared for none of those things" (Acts, xviii, 17)

92. *Tallyho*: cry to urge on the hounds.

102. *Saint John's Candlestick*: see Revelation, i, 12 and 20.

There was no standing it much longer.  
 "Good folks," thought I, as resolve grew stronger,  
 "This way you perform the Grand-Inquisitor 105  
 When the weather sends you a chance visitor?  
 You are the men, and wisdom shall die with you,  
 And none of the old Seven Churches vie with you!  
 But still, despite the pretty perfection  
 To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness, 110  
 And, taking God's word under wise protection,  
 Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,  
 And bid one reach it over hot ploughshares,—  
 Still, as I say, though you 've found salvation,  
 If I should choose to cry, as now, 'Shares!'— 115  
 See if the best of you bars me my ration!  
 I prefer, if you please, for my expounder  
 Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder;  
 Mine 's the same right with your poorest and sickliest  
 Supposing I don the marriage vestiment: 120  
 So, shut your mouth and open your Testament,  
 And carve me my portion at your quickest!"  
 Accordingly, as a shoemaker's lad  
 With wizened face in want of soap,  
 And wet apron wound round his waist like a rope, 125  
 (After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,  
 To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,  
 And so avoid disturbing the preacher)  
 —Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise  
 At the shutting door, and entered likewise, 130  
 Received the hinge's accustomed greeting,  
 And crossed the threshold's magic pentacle,  
 And found myself in full conventicle,  
 —To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,  
 On the Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine, 135  
 Which, calling its flock to their special clover,  
 Found all assembled and one sheep over,  
 Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

107. Spoken in irony; cf. Job, xii, 2.

108. *Seven Churches*: cf. Revelation, i, 20.

120. *Vestiment*: vestment. (See Matthew, xxii, 11ff.)

132. *Pentacle*: figure supposed to have magical significance.

## III

I very soon had enough of it.

The hot smell and the human noises, 140

And my neighbour's coat, the greasy cuff of it,

Were a pebble-stone that a child's hand poises,  
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure

Of the preaching man's immense stupidity,  
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure, 145

To meet his audience's avidity.

You needed not the wit of the Sibyl

To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling:

No sooner our friend had got an inkling  
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible, 150

(Whene'er 't was the thought first struck him,

How death, at unawares, might duck him

Deeper than the grave, and quench

The gin-shop's light in hell's grim drench)

Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence, 155

As to hug the book of books to pieces:

And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,

Not improved by the private dog's-ears and creases,  
Having clothed his own soul with, he'd fain see equipt yours,—  
So tossed you again your Holy Scriptures. 160

And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt:

Nay, had but a single face of my neighbours

Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labours

Were help which the world could be saved without,

'T is odds but I might have borne in quiet 165

A qualm or two at my spiritual diet,

Or (who can tell?) perchance even mustered

Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon:

139-186. Compare this section (III) with Elizabeth Barrett's remark in her letter to Browning, August 15, 1846, concerning the Dissenters, "the Formula is rampant among them as among others . . . you feel moreover bigotry and ignorance pressing on you on all sides, till you gasp for breath like one strangled. But better this, even, than what is elsewhere" (*Letters*, II, 427).

143. Like a heavy mass of crude metal.

147. *Sibyl*: ancient prophetess.

157. *In severance*: severed from the context that would show the meaning.

But the flock sat on, divinely flustered,  
     Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon 170  
 With such content in every snuffle,  
 As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.  
 My old fat woman purred with pleasure,  
     And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,  
 While she, to his periods keeping measure, 175  
     Maternally devoured the pastor.  
 The man with the handkerchief untied it,  
 Showed us a horrible wen inside it,  
 Gave his eyelids yet another screwing,  
 And rocked himself as the woman was doing. 180  
 The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,  
 Kept down his cough. 'T was too provoking!  
 My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it;  
     So, saying like Eve when she plucked the apple,  
     "I wanted a taste, and now there 's enough of it," 185  
 I flung out of the little chapel.

## IV

There was a lull in the rain, a lull  
     In the wind too; the moon was risen,  
 And would have shown out pure and full,  
     But for the ramparted cloud-prison, 190  
 Block on block built up in the West,  
 For what purpose the wind knows best,  
 Who changes his mind continually.  
 And the empty other half of the sky  
 Seemed in its silence as if it knew 195  
 What, any moment, might look through  
 A chance gap in that fortress massy:—  
     Through its fissures you got hints  
     Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,  
 Now, a dull lion-colour, now, brassy 200  
 Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,  
 Like furnace-smoke just ere flames bellow,  
 All a-simmer with intense strain  
 To let her through,—then blank again,  
 At the hope of her appearance failing. 205

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170. *Dew of Hermon*: see Psalms, cxxxiii, 3.

Just by the chapel a break in the railing  
 Shows a narrow path directly across;  
 'T is ever dry walking there, on the moss—  
 Besides, you go gently all the way uphill.  
     I stooped under and soon felt better; 210  
 My head grew lighter, my limbs more supple,  
     As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter.  
 My mind was full of the scene I had left,  
     That placid flock, that pastor vociferant,  
     —How this outside was pure and different! 215  
 The sermon, now—what a mingled weft  
 Of good and ill! Were either less,  
     Its fellow had coloured the whole distinctly;  
 But alas for the excellent earnestness,  
     And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly, 220  
 But as surely false, in their quaint presentment,  
 However to pastor and flock's contentment!  
 Say rather, such truths looked false to your eyes,  
     With his provings and parallels twisted and twined,  
 Till how could you know them, grown double their size 225  
     In the natural fog of the good man's mind,  
 Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps,  
 Haloed about with the common's damps?  
 Truth remains true, the fault 's in the prover;  
     The zeal was good, and the aspiration; 230  
 And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,  
     Pharaoh received no demonstration,  
 By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,  
 Of the doctrine of the Trinity,—  
 Although, as our preacher thus embellished it, 235  
 Apparently his hearers relished it  
 With so unfeigned a gust—who knows if  
 They did not prefer our friend to Joseph?  
 But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them!  
     These people have really felt, no doubt, 240  
 A something, the motion they style the Call of them;  
     And this is their method of bringing about,  
 By a mechanism of words and tones,  
 (So many texts in so many groans)



A sort of reviving and reproducing, 245  
     More or less perfectly, (who can tell?)  
 The mood itself, which strengthens by using;  
     And how that happens, I understand well.  
 A tune was born in my head last week,  
 Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek 250  
     Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester;  
     And when, next week, I take it back again,  
     My head will sing to the engine's clack again,  
 While it only makes my neighbour's haunches stir,  
 —Finding no dormant musical sprout 255  
 In him, as in me, to be jolted out.  
 'T is the taught already that profits by teaching;  
 He gets no more from the railway's preaching  
     Than, from this preacher who does the rail's office, I:  
 Whom therefore the flock cast a jealous eye on. 260  
 Still, why paint over their door "Mount Zion,"  
     To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy?

## V

But wherefore be harsh on a single case?  
     After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,  
 Does the self-same weary thing take place? 265  
     The same endeavour to make you believe,  
 And with much the same effect, no more:  
     Each method abundantly convincing,  
 As I say, to those convinced before,  
     But scarce to be swallowed without wincing 270  
 By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,  
 I have my own church equally:  
 And in this church my faith sprang first!  
     (I said, as I reached the rising ground,  
 And the wind began again, with a burst 275  
     Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound  
 From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,  
 I entered his church-door, nature leading me)  
 —In youth I looked to these very skies,  
 And probing their immensities, 280  
 I found God there, his visible power;

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262. See Hebrews, xii, 22-24.

Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense  
Of the power, an equal evidence  
That his love, there too, was the nobler dower.  
For the loving worm within its clod 285  
Were diviner than a loveless god  
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.  
You know what I mean: God's all, man's naught:  
But also, God, whose pleasure brought  
Man into being, stands away 290  
As it were a handbreadth off, to give  
Room for the newly-made to live,  
And look at him from a place apart,  
And use his gifts of brain and heart,  
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever. 295  
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever  
Man's very elements from man,  
Saying, "But all is God's"—whose plan  
Was to create man and then leave him  
Able, his own word saith, to grieve him, 300  
But able to glorify him too,  
As a mere machine could never do,  
That prayed or praised, all unaware  
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,  
Made perfect as a thing of course. 305  
Man, therefore, stands on his own stock  
Of love and power as a pin-point rock:  
And, looking to God who ordained divorce  
Of the rock from his boundless continent,  
Sees, in his power made evident, 310  
Only excess by a million-fold  
O'er the power God gave man in the mould.  
For, note: man's hand, first formed to carry  
A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry  
Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain, 315  
—Advancing in power by one degree;  
And why count steps through eternity?  
But love is the ever-springing fountain:  
Man may enlarge or narrow his bed  
For the water's play, but the water-head— 320  
How can he multiply or reduce it?  
As easy create it, as cause it to cease;

He may profit by it, or abuse it,  
But 't is not a thing to bear increase  
As power does: be love less or more 325  
In the heart of man, he keeps it shut  
Or opes it wide, as he pleases, but  
Love's sum remains what is was before.  
So, gazing up, in my youth, at love  
As seen through power, ever above 330  
All modes which make it manifest,  
My soul brought all to a single test—  
That he, the Eternal First and Last,  
Who, in his power, had so surpassed  
All man conceives of what is might,— 335  
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,  
—Would prove as infinitely good;  
Would never, (my soul understood,)  
With power to work all love desires,  
Bestow e'en less than man requires; 340  
That he who endlessly was teaching,  
Above my spirit's utmost reaching,  
What love can do in the leaf or stone,  
(So that to master this alone,  
This done in the stone or leaf for me, 345  
I must go on learning endlessly)  
Would never need that I, in turn,  
Should point him out defect unheeded,  
And show that God had yet to learn  
What the meanest human creature needed, 350  
—Not life, to wit, for a few short years,  
Tracking his way through doubts and fears,  
While the stupid earth on which I stay  
Suffers no change, but passive adds  
Its myriad years to myriads, 355  
Though I, he gave it to, decay,  
Seeing death come and choose about me,  
And my dearest ones depart without me.  
No: love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,  
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it, 360  
The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,  
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it.  
And I shall behold thee, face to face,

O God, and in thy light retrace  
 How in all I loved here, still wast thou! 365  
 Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,  
 I shall find as able to satiate  
 The love, thy gift, as my spirit's wonder  
 Thou art able to quicken and sublimate,  
 With this sky of thine, that I now walk under, 370  
 And glory in thee for, as I gaze  
 Thus, thus! Oh, let men keep their ways  
 Of seeking thee in a narrow shrine—  
 Be this my way! And this is mine!

## VI

For lo, what think you? suddenly 375  
 The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky  
 Received at once the full fruition  
 Of the moon's consummate apparition.  
 The black cloud-barricade was riven,  
 Ruined beneath her feet, and driven 380  
 Deep in the West; while, bare and breathless,  
 North and South and East lay ready  
 For a glorious thing that, dauntless, deathless,  
 Sprang across them and stood steady.  
 'T was a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect, 385  
 From heaven to heaven extending, perfect  
 As the mother-moon's self, full in face.  
 It rose, distinctly at the base  
 With its seven proper colours chorded,  
 Which still, in the rising, were compressed, 390  
 Until at last they coalesced,  
 And supreme the spectral creature lorded  
 In a triumph of whitest white,—  
 Above which intervened the night.  
 But above night too, like only the next, 395  
 The second of a wondrous sequence,  
 Reaching in rare and rarer frequency,  
 Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,

385. Browning said that all the incidents of this poem are imaginary, "save the lunar rainbow: I saw that" (Nicoll and Wise, *Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century*, I, 456).

389. *Chorded*: in harmony.

Another rainbow rose, a mightier,  
 Fainter, flushier and flightier,— 400  
 Rapture dying along its verge.  
 Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,  
 Whose, from the straining topmost dark,  
 On to the keystone of that arc?

## VII

This sight was shown me, there and then,— 405  
 Me, one out of a world of men,  
 Singled forth, as the chance might hap  
 To another if, in a thunderclap  
 Where I heard noise and you saw flame,  
 Some one man knew God called his name. 410  
 For me, I think I said, "Appear!  
 Good were it to be ever here.  
 If thou wilt, let me build to thee  
 Service-tabernacles three,  
 Where, forever in thy presence, 415  
 In ecstatic acquiescence,  
 Far alike from thriftless learning  
 And ignorance's undiscerning,  
 I may worship and remain!"  
 Thus at the show above me, gazing 420  
 With upturned eyes, I felt my brain  
 Glutted with the glory, blazing  
 Throughout its whole mass, over and under,  
 Until at length it burst asunder  
 And out of it bodily there streamed, 425  
 The too-much glory, as it seemed,  
 Passing from out me to the ground,  
 Then palely serpentining round  
 Into the dark with mazy error.

## VIII

All at once I looked up with terror. 430  
 He was there.  
 He himself with his human air.  
 On the narrow pathway, just before.  
 I saw the back of him, no more—  
 He had left the chapel, then, as I. 435

I forgot all about the sky.  
No face: only the sight  
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,  
With a hem that I could recognize.  
I felt terror, no surprise; 440  
My mind filled with the cataract  
At one bound of the mighty fact.  
"I remember, he did say  
Doubtless that, to this world's end,  
Where two or three should meet and pray, 445  
He would be in the midst, their friend;  
Certainly he was there with them!"  
And my pulses leaped for joy  
Of the golden thought without alloy,  
That I saw his very vesture's hem. 450  
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear,  
With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear;  
And I hastened, cried out while I pressed  
To the salvation of the vest,  
"But not so, Lord! It cannot be 455  
That thou, indeed, art leaving me—  
Me, that have despised thy friends!  
Did my heart make no amends?  
Thou art the love of God—above  
His power, didst hear me place his love, 460  
And that was leaving the world for thee.  
Therefore thou must not turn from me  
As I had chosen the other part!  
Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.  
Our best is bad, nor bears thy test; 465  
Still, it should be our very best.  
I thought it best that thou, the spirit,  
Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,  
And in beauty, as even we require it—  
Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth, 470  
I left but now, as scarcely fitted  
For thee: I knew not what I pitied.  
But, all I felt there, right or wrong,  
What is it to thee, who curest sinning?

Am I not weak as thou art strong? 475  
 I have looked to thee from the beginning,  
 Straight up to thee through all the world  
 Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled  
 To nothingness on either side:  
 And since the time thou wast descried, 480  
 Spite of the weak heart, so have I  
 Lived ever, and so fain would die,  
 Living and dying, thee before!  
 But if thou leavest me—"

## IX

Less or more,  
 I suppose that I spoke thus. 485  
 When,—have mercy, Lord, on us!  
 The whole face turned upon me full.  
 And I spread myself beneath it,  
 As when the bleacher spreads, to see the it  
 In the cleansing sun, his wool,— 490  
 Steeps in the flood of noontide whiteness  
 Some defiled, discoloured web—  
 So lay I, saturate with brightness.  
 And when the flood appeared to ebb,  
 Lo, I was walking, light and swift, 495  
 With my senses settling fast and steadying,  
 But my body caught up in the whirl and drift  
 Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying  
 On, just before me, still to be followed,  
 As it carried me after with its motion: 500  
 What shall I say?—as a path were hollowed  
 And a man went weltering through the ocean,  
 Sucked along in the flying wake  
 Of the luminous water-snake.  
 Darkness and cold were cloven, as through 505  
 I passed, upborne yet walking too.  
 And I turned to myself at intervals,—  
 "So he said, so it befalls.  
 God who registers the cup  
 Of mere cold water, for his sake 510  
 To a disciple rendered up,  
 Disdains not his own thirst to slake

At the poorest love was ever offered:  
 And because my heart I proffered,  
 With true love trembling at the brim, 515  
 He suffers me to follow him  
 For ever, my own way,—dispensed  
 From seeking to be influenced  
 By all the less immediate ways  
     That earth, in worships manifold, 520  
 Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,  
     The garment's hem, which, lo, I hold!"

## X

And so we crossed the world and stopped.  
     For where am I, in city or plain,  
     Since I am 'ware of the world again? 525  
 And what is this that rises propped  
 With pillars of prodigious girth?  
 Is it really on the earth,  
 This miraculous Dome of God?  
 Has the angel's measuring-rod 530  
 Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,  
 'Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,  
 Meted it out,—and what he meted,  
 Have the sons of men completed?  
 —Binding, ever as he bade, 535  
 Columns in the colonnade  
 With arms wide open to embrace  
 The entry of the human race  
 To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,  
 Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding, 540  
 With marble for brick, and stones of price  
 For garniture of the edifice?  
 Now I see; it is no dream;  
 It stands there and it does not seem:  
 For ever, in pictures, thus it looks, 545  
 And thus I have read of it in books  
 Often in England, leagues away,  
 And wondered how these fountains play,  
 Growing up eternally



Each to a musical water-tree, 550  
 Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,  
 Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,  
 To the granite lavers underneath.  
 Liar and dreamer in your teeth!  
 I, the sinner that speak to you, 555  
 Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew  
 Both this and more. For see, for see,  
 The dark is rent, mine eye is free  
 To pierce the crust of the outer wall,  
 And I view inside, and all there, all, 560  
 As the swarming hollow of a hive,  
 The whole Basilica alive!  
 Men in the chancel, body and nave,  
 Men on the pillars' architrave,  
 Men on the statues, men on the tombs 565  
 With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,  
 All famishing in expectation  
 Of the main altar's consummation.  
 For see, for see, the rapturous moment  
 Approaches, and earth's best endowment 570  
 Blends with heaven's; the taper-fires  
 Pant up, the winding brazen spires  
 Heave loftier yet the baldachin;  
 The incense-gaspings, long kept in,  
 Suspire in clouds; the organ blatant 575  
 Holds his breath and grovels latent,  
 As if God's hushing finger grazed him,  
 (Like Behemoth when he praised him)  
 At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,  
 Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling 580  
 On the sudden pavements strewed  
 With faces of the multitude.  
 Earth breaks up, time drops away,  
 In flows heaven, with its new day  
 Of endless life, when He who trod, 585

562. *Basilica*: the Cathedral.

573. *Baldachin*: the canopy over the altar, 95 feet high, supported by magnificent twisted brazen columns designed by Bernini.

578. *Behemoth*: see Job, xl, 15 ff.

579. At the elevation of the Host or Sacrament.

Very man and very God,  
 This earth in weakness, shame and pain,  
 Dying the death whose signs remain  
 Up yonder on the accursed tree,—  
 Shall come again, no more to be 590  
 Of captivity the thrall,  
 But the one God, All in all,  
 King of kings, Lord of lords,  
 As His servant John received the words,  
 "I died, and live for evermore!" 595

## XI

Yet I was left outside the door.  
 "Why sit I here on the threshold-stone  
 Left till He return, alone  
 Save for the garment's extreme fold  
 Abandoned still to bless my hold?" 600  
 My reason, to my doubt, replied,  
 As if a book were opened wide,  
 And at a certain page I traced  
 Every record undefaced,  
 Added by successive years,— 605  
 The harvestings of truth's stray ears  
 Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf  
 Bound together for belief.  
 Yes, I said—that he will go  
 And sit with these in turn, I know. 610  
 Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims  
 Too giddily to guide her limbs,  
 Disabled by their palsy-stroke  
 From propping mine. Though Rome's gross yoke  
 Drops off, no more to be endured, 615  
 Her teaching is not so obscured  
 By errors and perversities,  
 That no truth shines athwart the lies:  
 And he, whose eye detects a spark  
 Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark, 620  
 May well see flame where each beholder  
 Acknowledges the embers smoulder.

But I, a mere man, fear to quit  
The clue God gave me as most fit  
To guide my footsteps through life's maze, 625  
Because himself discerns all ways  
Open to reach him: I, a man  
Able to mark where faith began  
To swerve aside, till from its summit  
Judgment drops her damning plummet, 630  
Pronouncing such a fatal space  
Departed from the founder's base:  
He will not bid me enter too,  
But rather sit, as now I do,  
Awaiting his return outside. 635  
—'T was thus my reason straight replied  
And joyously I turned, and pressed  
The garment's skirt upon my breast,  
Until, afresh its light suffusing me,  
My heart cried—What has been abusing me 640  
That I should wait here lonely and coldly,  
Instead of rising, entering boldly,  
Baring truth's face, and letting drift  
Her veils of lies as they choose to shift?  
Do these men praise him? I will raise 645  
My voice up to their point of praise!  
I see the error; but above  
The scope of error, see the love.—  
Oh, love of those first Christian days!  
—Fanned so soon into a blaze, 650  
From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,  
That the antique sovereign Intellect  
Which then sat ruling in the world,  
Like a change in dreams, was hurled  
From the throne he reigned upon: 655  
You looked up and he was gone.  
Gone, his glory of the pen!  
—Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,  
Bade her scribes abhor the trick  
Of poetry and rhetoric, 660

652. Browning agrees with Evangelical Christianity in rejecting rationalism as a guide to life.

And exult with hearts set free,  
 In blessed imbecility  
 Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet  
 Leaving Sallust incomplete.  
 Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter! 665  
 —Love, while able to acquaint her  
 While the thousand statues yet  
 Fresh from chisel, pictures wet  
 From brush, she saw on every side,  
 Chose rather with an infant's pride 670  
 To frame those portents which impart  
 Such unction to true Christian Art.  
 Gone, music too! The air was stirred  
 By happy wings: Terpander's bird  
 (That, when the cold came, fled away) 675  
 Would tarry not the wintry day,—  
 As more-enduring sculpture must,  
 Till filthy saints rebuked the gust  
 With which they chanced to get a sight  
 Of some dear naked Aphrodite 680  
 They glanced a thought above the toes of,  
 By breaking zealously her nose off.  
 Love, surely, from that music's lingering,  
 Might have filched her organ-fingering,  
 Nor chosen rather to set prayings 685  
 To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.  
 Love was the startling thing, the new:  
 Love was the all-sufficient too;  
 And seeing that, you see the rest:  
 As a babe can find its mother's breast 690  
 As well in darkness as in light,  
 Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.  
 True, the world's eyes are open now:  
 —Less need for me to disallow  
 Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled, 695

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663-4. Contemptuous of pagan culture, some of the early Christians wrote on sheets torn from ancient manuscripts. The lost portions of the writings of Sallust, Roman historian, may have been destroyed in this way.

674. Terpander was the father of Greek music; his bird was the nightingale.

680. *Aphrodite*: Greek goddess of Love and Beauty.

Peevish as ever to be suckled,  
 Lulled by the same old baby-prattle  
 With intermixture of the rattle,  
 When she would have them creep, stand steady  
 Upon their feet, or walk already, 700  
 Not to speak of trying to climb.  
 I will be wise another time,  
 And not desire a wall between us,  
 When next I see a church-roof cover  
 So many species of one genus, 705  
 All with foreheads bearing *lover*  
 Written above the earnest eyes of them;  
 All with breasts that beat for beauty,  
 Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them,  
 In noble daring, steadfast duty, 710  
 The heroic in passion, or in action,—  
 Or, lowered for sense's satisfaction,  
 To the mere outside of human creatures,  
 Mere perfect form and faultless features.  
 What? with all Rome here, whence to levy 715  
 Such contributions to their appetite,  
 With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,  
 They take, as it were, a padlock, clap it tight  
 On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding  
 On the glories of their ancient reading, 720  
 On the beauties of their modern singing,  
 On the wonders of the builder's bringing,  
 On the majesties of Art around them,—  
 And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,  
 When faith has at last united and bound them, 725  
 They offer up to God for a present?  
 Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it,—  
 And, only taking the act in reference  
 To the other recipients who might have allowed it,  
 I will rejoice that God had the preference. 730

## XII

So I summed up my new resolves:  
 Too much love there can never be.  
 And where the intellect devolves  
 Its function on love exclusively,

I, a man who possesses both, 735  
 Will accept the provision, nothing loth,  
 —Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,  
 That my intellect may find its share.  
 And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,  
 And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist, 740  
 Who, examining the capabilities  
     Of the block of marble he has to fashion  
     Into a type of thought or passion,—  
 Not always, using obvious facilities,  
 Shapes it, as any artist can, 745  
 Into a perfect symmetrical man,  
 Complete from head to foot of the life-size,  
 Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes,—  
 But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate  
 A Colossus by no means so easy to come at, 750  
 And uses the whole of his block for the bust,  
     Leaving the mind of the public to finish it,  
 Since cut it ruefully short he must:  
 On the face alone he expends his devotion,  
     He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it, 755  
 —Saying, "Applaud me for this grand notion  
 Of what a face may be! As for completing it  
     In breast and body and limbs, do that, you!"  
 All hail! I fancy how, happily meeting it,  
     A trunk and legs would perfect the statue, 760  
 Could man carve so as to answer volition.  
     And how much nobler than petty cavils,  
     Were a hope to find, in my spirit-travels,  
 Some artist of another ambition,  
 Who having a block to carve, no bigger, 765  
     Has spent his power on the opposite quest,  
     And believed to begin at the feet was best—  
 For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure!

## XIII

No sooner said than out in the night!  
 My heart beat lighter and more light: 770  
 And still, as before, I was walking swift,  
     With my senses settling fast and steadying,

But my body caught up in the whirl and drift  
 Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying  
 On, just before me, still to be followed, 775  
 As it carried me after with its motion,  
 What shall I say?—as a path were hollowed,  
 And a man went weltering through the ocean,  
 Sucked along in the flying wake  
 Of the luminous water-snake. 780

## XIV

Alone! I am left alone once more—  
 (Save for the garment's extreme fold  
 Abandoned still to bless my hold)  
 Alone, beside the entrance-door  
 Of a sort of temple—perhaps a college, 785  
 —Like nothing I ever saw before  
 At home in England, to my knowledge.  
 The tall old quaint irregular town!  
 It may be . . . though which, I can't affirm . . . any  
 Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany; 790  
 And this flight of stairs where I sit down,  
 Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, Frankfort  
 Or Göttingen, I have to thank for 't?  
 It may be Göttingen,—most likely.  
 Through the open door I catch obliquely 795  
 Glimpses of a lecture-hall;  
 And not a bad assembly neither,  
 Ranged decent and symmetrical  
 On benches, waiting what 's to see there;  
 Which, holding still by the vesture's hem, 800  
 I also resolve to see with them,  
 Cautious this time how I suffer to slip  
 The chance of joining in fellowship  
 With any that call themselves his friends;  
 As these folks do, I have a notion. 805  
 But hist—a buzzing and emotion!  
 All settle themselves, the while ascends

793. *Göttingen*: German university noted for its contribution to Biblical scholarship (the "Higher Criticism").

By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,  
     Step by step, deliberate  
     Because of his cranium's over-freight, 810  
 Three parts sublime to one grotesque,  
 If I have proved an accurate guesser,  
 The hawk-nosed high-cheek-boned Professor.  
 I felt at once as if there ran  
 A shoot of love from my heart to the man— 815  
 That sallow virgin-minded studious  
     Martyr to mild enthusiasm,  
 As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious  
     That woke my sympathetic spasm,  
 (Beside some spitting that made me sorry) 820  
 And stood, surveying his auditory  
 With a wan pure look, well nigh celestial,—  
     Those blue eyes had survived so much!  
 While, under the foot they could not smutch,  
 Lay all the fleshly and the bestial. 825  
 Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,  
 Till the auditory's clearing of throats  
 Was done with, died into a silence;  
     And, when each glance was upward sent,  
     Each bearded mouth composed intent, 830  
 And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence,—  
 He pushed back higher his spectacles,  
 Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,  
 And giving his head of hair—a hake  
     Of undressed tow, for colour and quantity— 835  
 One rapid and impatient shake,  
 (As our own Young England adjusts a jaunty tie

810. Browning considers Biblical scholarship ridiculously "highbrow." This is aimed especially at David Friedrich Strauss whose book, *The Life of Jesus*, which attacked the Gospels as "myths," had appeared in the English translation of Marian Evans (George Eliot) in 1846. In sections XV-XVII of this poem, "starting with the premises of Strauss, the Göttingen professor draws conclusions which resemble those of Comte and Matthew Arnold rather than those set forth in the *Leben Jesu* and the *Ver-gängliches und Bleibendes in Christentum*" (Raymond, W. O., "Browning and the Higher Criticism," PMLA, XLIV, 1929, p. 600).

834. *Hake*: bunch.

837. *Young England*: the political counterpart (here, the equivalent) of the Oxford Movement which considered the Church of England to be Catholic rather than Protestant, and hence came to emphasize ritual, vest-



When about to impart, on mature digestion,  
 Some thrilling view of the surplice-question)  
 —The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse, 840  
 Broke into his Christmas-Eve discourse.

## XV

And he began it by observing  
 How reason dictated that men  
 Should rectify the natural swerving,  
 By a reversion, now and then, 845  
 To the well-heads of knowledge, few  
 And far away, whence rolling grew  
 The life-stream wide whereat we drink,  
 Commingled, as we needs must think,  
 With waters alien to the source; 850  
 To do which, aimed this eve's discourse;  
 Since, where could be a fitter time  
 For tracing backward to its prime  
 This Christianity, this lake,  
 This reservoir, whereat we slake, 855  
 From one or other bank, our thirst?  
 So, he proposed inquiring first  
 Into the various sources whence  
 This Myth of Christ is derivable;  
 Demanding from the evidence, 860  
 (Since plainly no such life was liveable)  
 How these phenomena should class?  
 Whether 't were best opine Christ was,  
 Or never was at all, or whether  
 He was and was not, both together— 865  
 It matters little for the name,  
 So the idea be left the same.  
 Only, for practical purpose' sake,  
 'T was obviously as well to take  
 The popular story,—understanding 870  
 How the ineptitude of the time,

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ments, *etc.* Its leader, John Henry Newman, had just recently shocked Protestant England by going on beyond this "Anglo-Catholicism" and joining the Roman Catholic Church. Cf. Thackeray's clergyman Charles Honeyman in *The Newcomes* (1853-5).

And the penman's prejudice, expanding  
 Fact into fable fit for the clime,  
 Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it  
 Into this myth, this Individuum,— 875  
 Which when reason had strained and abated it  
 Of foreign matter, left, for residuum,  
 A Man!—a right true man, however,  
 Whose work was worthy a man's endeavour:  
 Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient 880  
 To his disciples, for rather believing  
 He was just omnipotent and omniscient,  
 As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving  
 His word, their tradition,—which, though it meant  
 Something entirely different 885  
 From all that those who only heard it,  
 In their simplicity thought and averred it,  
 Had yet a meaning quite as respectable:  
 For, among other doctrines delectable,  
 Was he not surely the first to insist on 890  
 The natural sovereignty of our race?—  
 Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.  
 And while his cough, like a drouthy piston,  
 Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,  
 I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him, 895  
 The vesture still within my hand.

## XVI

I could interpret its command.  
 This time he would not bid me enter  
 The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.  
 Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic 900  
 When Papist struggles with Dissenter,  
 Impregnating its pristine clarity,  
 —One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,  
 Its gust of broken meat and garlic;  
 —One, by his soul's too-much presuming 905  
 To turn the frankincense's fuming  
 And vapours of the candle starlike

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875. *Individuum*: Latin for an indivisible unit.

900. *Mephitic*: foul or poisonous.

Into the cloud her wings she buoys on.  
 Each, that thus sets the pure air seething,  
 May poison it for healthy breathing— 910  
 But the Critic leaves no air to poison;  
 Pumps out with ruthless ingenuity  
 Atom by atom, and leaves you—vacuity.  
 Thus much of Christ does he reject?  
 And what retain? His intellect? 915  
 What is it I must reverence duly?  
 Poor intellect for worship, truly,  
 Which tells me simply what was told  
 (If mere morality, bereft  
 Of the God in Christ, be all that's left) 920  
 Elsewhere by voices manifold;  
 With this advantage, that the stater  
 Made nowise the important stumble  
 Of adding, he, the sage and humble,  
 Was also one with the Creator. 925  
 You urge Christ's followers' simplicity:  
 But how does shifting blame evade it?  
 Have wisdom's words no more felicity?  
 The stumbling-block, his speech—who laid it?  
 How comes it that for one found able 930  
 To sift the truth of it from fable,  
 Millions believe it to the letter?  
 Christ's goodness, then—does that fare better?  
 Strange goodness, which upon the score  
 Of being goodness, the mere due 935  
 Of man to fellow-man, much more  
 To God—should take another view  
 Of its possessor's privilege,  
 And bid him rule his race! You pledge  
 Your fealty to such rule? What, all— 940  
 From heavenly John and Attic Paul,  
 And that brave weather-battered Peter,  
 Whose stout faith only stood completer  
 For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,  
 As, more his hands hauled nets, they hardened— 945  
 All, down to you, the man of men,

941. St. John and St. Paul were men of Greek culture which was largely Attic (Athenian) in origin.

Professing here at Göttingen,  
 Compose Christ's flock! They, you and I,  
 Are sheep of a good man! And why?  
 The goodness,—how did he acquire it? 950  
 Was it self-gained, did God inspire it?  
 Choose which; then tell me, on what ground  
 Should its possessor dare propound  
 His claim to rise o'er us an inch?  
 Were goodness all some man's invention, 955  
 Who arbitrarily made mention  
 What we should follow, and whence flinch,—  
 What qualities might take the style  
 Of right and wrong,—and had such guessing  
 Met with as general acquiescing 960  
 As graced the alphabet erewhile,  
 When A got leave an Ox to be,  
 No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G,—  
 For thus inventing thing and title  
 Worship were that man's fit requital. 965  
 But if the common conscience must  
 Be ultimately judge, adjust  
 Its apt name to each quality  
 Already known,—I would decree  
 Worship for such mere demonstration 970  
 And simple work of nomenclature,  
 Only the day I praised, not nature,  
 But Harvey, for the circulation.  
 I would praise such a Christ, with pride  
 And joy, that he, as none beside, 975  
 Had taught us how to keep the mind  
 God gave him, as God gave his kind,  
 Freer than they from fleshly taint:  
 I would call such a Christ our Saint,

962-3. The letter *Aleph* (A) in Hebrew was suggested by an ox head, and *Gimel* (G) means camel.

966-7. Browning here refers to the theory which gives morality a humanistic basis by establishing criteria of right and wrong upon the verdict of universal human judgment.

973. William Harvey (1578-1657) discovered the circulation of the blood.

979 ff. Compare Browning's "The Names" concerning these different degrees of respect.

As I declare our Poet, him 980  
 Whose insight makes all others dim:  
 A thousand poets pried at life,  
 And only one amid the strife  
 Rose to be Shakespeare: each shall take  
 His crown, I'd say, for the world's sake— 985  
 Though some objected—"Had we seen  
 The heart and head of each, what screen  
 Was broken there to give them light,  
 While in ourselves it shuts the sight,  
 We should no more admire, perchance, 990  
 That these found truth out at a glance,  
 Than marvel how the bat discerns  
 Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,  
 Led by a finer tact, a gift  
 He boasts, which other birds must shift 995  
 Without, and grope as best they can."  
 No, freely I would praise the man,—  
 Nor one whit more, if he contended  
 That gift of his from God descended.  
 Ah friend, what gift of man's does not? 1000  
 No nearer something, by a jot,  
 Rise an infinity of nothings  
 Than one: take Euclid for your teacher:  
 Distinguish kinds: do crownings, clothings,  
 Make that creator which was creature? 1005  
 Multiply gifts upon man's head,  
 And what, when all's done, shall be said  
 But—the more gifted he, I ween!  
 That one's made Christ, this other, Pilate,  
 And this might be all that has been, — 1010  
 So what is there to frown or smile at?  
 What is left for us, save, in growth  
 Of soul, to rise up, far past both,  
 From the gift looking to the giver,  
 And from the cistern to the river, 1015  
 And from the finite to infinity,  
 And from man's dust to God's divinity?

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1003. *Euclid*: the great Greek mathematician of the third century B.C. whose *Elements* served as an introduction to geometry for twenty centuries.

## XVII

Take all in a word: the truth in God's breast  
 Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed:  
 Though he is so bright and we so dim, 1020  
 We are made in his image to witness him:  
 And were no eye in us to tell,  
     Instructed by no inner sense,  
 The light of heaven from the dark of hell,  
     That light would want its evidence,— 1025  
 Though justice, good and truth were still  
 Divine, if, by some demon's will,  
 Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed  
 Law through the worlds, and right misnamed.  
 No mere exposition of morality 1030  
 Made or in part or in totality,  
 Should win you to give it worship, therefore:  
 And, if no better proof you will care for,  
 —Whom do you count the worst man upon earth?  
     Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more 1035  
 Of what right is, than arrives at birth  
     In the best man's acts that we bow before:  
 This last knows better—true, but my fact is,  
 'T is one thing to know, and another to practice.  
 And thence I conclude that the real God-function 1040  
 Is to furnish a motive and injunction  
 For practising what we know already.  
 And such an injunction and such a motive  
 As the God in Christ, do you waive, and "heady,  
 High-minded," hang your tablet-votive 1045  
 Outside the fane on a finger-post?  
 Morality to the uttermost,  
 Supreme in Christ as we all confess,  
 Why need we prove would avail no jot  
 To make him God, if God he were not? 1050

1041-2. Compare "A Defence of Poetry" by Shelley, whom Browning admired most of all nineteenth-century poets: "We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practice . . . we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine . . . and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave." But the conclusions drawn by Browning are very different from Shelley's.

What is the point where himself lays stress?  
 Does the precept run "Believe in good,  
 In justice, truth, now understood  
 For the first time"?—or, "Believe in me,  
 Who lived and died, yet essentially 1055  
 Am Lord of Life"? Whoever can take  
 The same to his heart and for mere love's sake  
 Conceive of the love,—that man obtains  
 A new truth; no conviction gains  
 Of an old one only, made intense 1060  
 By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

## XVIII

Can it be that he stays inside?  
 Is the vesture left me to commune with?  
 Could my soul find aught to sing in tune with  
 Even at this lecture, if she tried? 1065  
 Oh, let me at lowest sympathize  
 With the lurking drop of blood that lies  
 In the desiccated brain's white roots  
 Without throb for Christ's attributes,  
 As the lecturer makes his special boast! 1070  
 If love's dead there, it has left a ghost.  
 Admire we, how from heart to brain  
 (Though to say so strike the doctors dumb)  
 One instinct rises and falls again,  
 Restoring the equilibrium. 1075  
 And how when the Critic had done his best,  
 And the pearl of price, at reason's test,  
 Lay dust and ashes levigable  
 On the Professor's lecture-table,—  
 When we looked for the inference and monition 1080  
 That our faith, reduced to such condition,  
 Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole,—  
 He bids us, when we least expect it,  
 Take back our faith,—if it be not just whole,  
 Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it, 1085  
 Which fact pays damage done rewardingly,

1051-6. Many Christian thinkers would disagree with Browning as to which of these Christ emphasized. Cf. John xviii, 36-38.

1078. *Levigable*: capable of being reduced to powder.

So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly!

"Go home and venerate the myth

I thus have experimented with—

This man, continue to adore him

1090

Rather than all who went before him,

And all who ever followed after!"—

Surely for this I may praise you, my brother!

Will you take the praise in tears or laughter?

That 's one point gained: can I compass another?

1095

Unlearned love was safe from spurning—

Can't we respect your loveless learning?

Let us at least give learning honour!

What laurels had we showered upon her,

Girding her loins up to perturb

1100

Our theory of the Middle Verb;

Or Turk-like brandishing a scimitar

O'er anapæsts in comic-trimeter;

Or curing the halt and maimed 'Iketides,'

While we lounged on at our indebted ease:

1105

Instead of which, a tricky demon

Sets her at Titus or Philemon!

When ignorance wags his ears of leather

And hates God's word, 't is altogether;

Nor leaves he his congenial thistles

1110

To go and browse on Paul's Epistles.

—And you, the audience, who might ravage

The world wide, enviably savage,

Nor heed the cry of the retriever,

More than Herr Heine (before his fever),—

1115

I do not tell a lie so arrant

As say my passion's wings are furled up,

1101. *Middle Verb*: a reflexive form.

1103. The three-syllable foot with accent on the last syllable is unusual in trimeter (three-foot) verse.

1104. '*Iketides*': "The Suppliants," a tragedy by Aeschylus that exists only in fragmentary form.

1107. The question is whether books of the Bible, like *Titus* and *Philemon*, should be studied by the scholarly methods that may be tolerated when applied to Aeschylus. At the end of his life (in "Development") Browning even objects to such research applied to the *Iliad*.

1115. The German poet Heine, converted by illness to a more spiritual life.



And, without plainest heavenly warrant,  
 I were ready and glad to give the world up—  
 But still, when you rub brow meticulous, 1120  
 And ponder the profit of turning holy  
 If not for God's, for your own sake solely,  
 —God forbid I should find you ridiculous!  
 Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,  
 Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you, 1125  
 "Christians,"—abhor the deist's pravity,—  
 Go on, you shall no more move my gravity  
 Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse,  
 I find it in my heart to embarrass them  
 By hinting that their stick 's a mock horse, 1130  
 And they really carry what they say carries them.

## XIX

So sat I talking with my mind.  
 I did not long to leave the door  
 And find a new church, as before,  
 But rather was quiet and inclined 1135  
 To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting  
 From further tracking and trying and testing.  
 "This tolerance is a genial mood!"  
 (Said I, and a little pause ensued).  
 "One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf, 1140  
 And sees, each side, the good effects of it,  
 A value for religion's self,  
 A carelessness about the sects of it.  
 Let me enjoy my own conviction,  
 Not watch my neighbour's faith with fretfulness, 1145  
 Still spying there some dereliction  
 Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!  
 Better a mild indifferentism,  
 Teaching that both our faiths (though duller  
 His shine through a dull spirit's prism) 1150  
 Originally had one colour!  
 Better pursue a pilgrimage  
 Through ancient and through modern times  
 To many peoples, various climes,

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1126. *Pravity*: depravity. Matthew Arnold in his religious position was close to the school attacked here, yet called himself a Christian and rejected Deism.

Where I may see saint, savage, sage  
 Fuse their respective creeds in one  
 Before the general Father's throne!" 1155

## XX

—'T was the horrible storm began afresh!  
 The black night caught me in his mesh,  
 Whirled me up, and flung me prone. 1160  
 I was left on the college-step alone.  
 I looked, and far there, ever fleeting  
 Far, far away, the receding gesture,  
 And looming of the lessening vesture!—  
 Swept forward from my stupid hand, 1165  
 While I watched my foolish heart expand  
 In the lazy glow of benevolence,

O'er the various modes of man's belief.  
 I sprang up with fear's vehemence.

Needs must there be one way, our chief 1170  
 Best way of worship: let me strive  
 To find it, and when found, contrive  
 My fellows also take their share!  
 This constitutes my earthly care:  
 God's is above it and distinct. 1175  
 For I, a man, with men am linked  
 And not a brute with brutes; no gain  
 That I experience, must remain  
 Unshared: but should my best endeavour  
 To share it, fail—subsisteth ever 1180  
 God's care above, and I exult  
 That God, by God's own ways occult,  
 May—doth, I will believe—bring back  
 All wanderers to a single track.

Meantime, I can but testify 1185  
 God's care for me—no more, can I—  
 It is but for myself I know;

The world rolls witnessing around me  
 Only to leave me as it found me;  
 Men cry there, but my ear is slow: 1190  
 Their races flourish or decay  
 —What boots it, while yon lucid way  
 Loaded with stars divides the vault?

But soon my soul repairs its fault  
 When, sharpening sense's hebetude, 1195  
 She turns on my own life! So viewed,  
 No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense  
 With witnessings of providence:  
 And woe to me if when I look  
 Upon that record, the sole book 1200  
 Unsealed to me, I take no heed  
 Of any warning that I read!  
 Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve,  
 God's own hand did the rainbow weave,  
 Whereby the truth from heaven slid 1205  
 Into my soul?—I cannot bid  
 The world admit he stooped to heal  
 My soul, as if in a thunder-peal  
 Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,  
 I only knew he named my name: 1210  
 But what is the world to me, for sorrow  
 Or joy in its censure, when to-morrow  
 It drops the remark, with just-turned head  
 Then, on again, 'That man is dead'?  
 Yes, but for me—my name called,—drawn 1215  
 As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,  
 He has dipt into on a battle-dawn:  
 Bid out of life by a nod, a glance,—  
 Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance,—  
 With a rapid finger circled round, 1220  
 Fixed to the first poor inch of ground  
 To fight from, where his foot was found;  
 Whose ear but a minute since lay free  
 To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry—  
 Summoned, a solitary man 1225  
 To end his life where his life began,  
 From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van!  
 Soul of mine, hadst thou caught and held  
 By the hem of the vesture!—

## XXI

And I caught  
 At the flying robe, and unrepelled 1230  
 Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught

With warmth and wonder and delight,  
 God's mercy being infinite.  
 For scarce had the words escaped my tongue,  
 When, at a passionate bound, I sprung 1235  
 Out of the wandering world of rain,  
 Into the little chapel again.

## XXII

How else was I found there, bolt upright  
 On my bench, as if I had never left it?  
 —Never flung out on the common at night, 1240  
 Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,  
 Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,  
 Or the laboratory of the Professor!  
 For the Vision, that was true, I wist,  
 True as that heaven and earth exist. 1245  
 There sat my friend, the yellow and tall,  
 With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place;  
 Yet my nearest neighbour's cheek showed gall.  
 She had slid away a contemptuous space:  
 And the old fat woman, late so placable, 1250  
 Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakable,  
 Of her milk of kindness turning rancid.  
 In short, a spectator might have fancied  
 That I had nodded, betrayed by slumber,  
 Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly, 1255  
 Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,  
 And woke up now at the tenth and lastly.  
 But again, could such disgrace have happened?  
 Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it;  
 And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end? 1260  
 Unless I heard it, could I have judged it?  
 Could I report as I do at the close,  
 First, the preacher speaks through his nose:  
 Second, his gesture is too emphatic:  
 Thirdly, to waive what's pedagogic, 1265  
 The subject-matter itself lacks logic:  
 Fourthly, the English is ungrammatical.  
 Great news! the preacher is found no Pascal,

1242. *Raree-show*: peep-show.

1268. *Pascal*: great French religious thinker (1623-1662).

Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call  
 Of making square to a finite eye 1270  
 The circle of infinity,  
 And find so all-but-just-succeeding!  
 Great news! the sermon proves no reading  
 Where bee-like in the flowers I bury me,  
 Like Taylor's, the immortal Jeremy! 1275  
 And now that I know the very worst of him,  
 What was it I thought to obtain at first of him?  
 Ha! Is God mocked, as he asks?  
 Shall I take on me to change his tasks,  
 And dare, dispatched to a river-head 1280  
 For a simple draught of the element,  
 Neglect the thing for which he sent,  
 And return with another thing instead?—  
 Saying, "Because the water found  
 Welling up from underground, 1285  
 Is mingled with the taints of earth,  
 While thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,  
 And couldst, at wink or word, convulse  
 The world with the leap of a river-pulse,—  
 Therefore I turned from the oozeings muddy, 1290  
 And bring thee a chalice I found, instead:  
 See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy!  
 One would suppose that the marble bled.  
 What matters the water? A hope I have nursed:  
 The waterless cup will quench my thirst." 1295  
 —Better have knelt at the poorest stream  
 That trickles in pain from the straitest rift!  
 For the less or the more is all God's gift,  
 Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite-seam.  
 And here, is there water or not, to drink? 1300  
 I then, in ignorance and weakness,  
 Taking God's help, have attained to think  
 My heart does best to receive in meekness  
 That mode of worship, as most to his mind,  
 Where earthly aids being cast behind, 1305

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1275. *Jeremy Taylor*: one of the greatest English writers of sermons (1613–1667).

1292. *Breccia*: stone of variegated colors, composed of different minerals.

His All in All appears serene  
 With the thinnest human veil between,  
 Letting the mystic lamps, the seven,  
     The many motions of his spirit,  
 Pass, as they list, to earth from heaven. 1310  
     For the preacher's merit or demerit,  
 It were to be wished the flaws were fewer  
     In the earthen vessel, holding treasure  
 Which lies as safe in a golden ewer;  
     But the main thing is, does it hold good measure? 1315  
 Heaven soon sets right all other matters!—  
     Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,  
 This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,  
     This soul a struggle with insanity,  
 Who thence take comfort—can I doubt?— 1320  
 Which an empire gained, were a loss without.  
 May it be mine! And let us hope  
 That no worse blessing befall the Pope,  
 Turned sick at last of to-day's buffoonery,  
     Of posturings and petticoatings, 1325  
     Beside his Bourbon bully's gloatings  
 In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery!  
 Nor may the Professor forego its peace  
     At Göttingen presently, when, in the dusk  
 Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase, 1330  
     Prophesied of by that horrible husk—  
 When thicker and thicker the darkness fills  
 The world through his misty spectacles,  
 And he gropes for something more substantial  
     Than a fable, myth or personification,— 1335  
 May Christ do for him what no mere man shall,  
     And stand confessed as the God of salvation!  
 Meantime, in the still recurring fear  
     Lest myself, at unawares, be found,

1305-7. Cf. another statement of Protestant preferences in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853): "I told him how we kept fewer forms between us and God; retaining, indeed, no more than, perhaps, the nature of mankind in the mass rendered necessary for due observance" (ch. XXXVI).

1326. Ferdinand II of Naples and Sicily was a reactionary Bourbon despot. The Brownings were disappointed at the failure of the new and liberal Pope, Pius IX, to defend liberalism as they had hoped he would.

While attacking the choice of my neighbours round, 1340  
 With none of my own made—I choose here!  
 The giving out of the hymn reclaims me;  
 I have done: and if any blames me,  
 Thinking that merely to touch in brevity  
 The topics I dwell on, were unlawful,— 1345  
 Or worse, that I trench, with undue levity,  
 On the bounds of the holy and the awful,—  
 I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,  
 And refer myself to THEE, instead of him,  
 Who head and heart alike discernest, 1350  
 Looking below light speech we utter,  
 When frothy spume and frequent sputter  
 Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest!  
 May truth shine out, stand ever before us!  
 I put up pencil and join chorus 1355  
 To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,  
 The last five verses of the third section  
 Of the seventeenth hymn of Whitfield's Collection,  
 To conclude with the doxology.

## EASTER-DAY\*

## I

How very hard it is to be  
 A Christian! Hard for you and me,  
 —Not the mere task of making real  
 That duty up to its ideal,  
 Effecting thus, complete and whole, 5  
 A purpose of the human soul—  
 For that is always hard to do;  
 But hard, I mean, for me and you  
 To realize it, more or less

1358. *Whitfield's Collection*: a hymnal used especially by Calvinistic Methodists.

\* See note to "Christmas Eve," with which this was published in 1850. While neither of the two men who are speaking in the poem completely expresses Browning's usual attitude, between them they set forth his first full "confession of faith." Browning holds that the one sufficient basis for Christian Hope and Faith is Love—not Nature, Art, or Intellect. Cf. "Epistle of Karshish," footnote to 305 ff.

With even the moderate success 10  
 Which commonly repays our strife  
 To carry out the aims of life.  
 "This aim is greater," you will say,  
 "And so more arduous every way."  
 —But the importance of their fruits 15  
 Still proves to man, in all pursuits,  
 Proportional encouragement.  
 "Then, what if it be God's intent  
 That labour to this one result  
 Should seem unduly difficult?" 20  
 Ah, that 's a question in the dark—  
 And the sole thing that I remark  
 Upon the difficulty, this:  
 We do not see it where it is,  
 At the beginning of the race: 25  
 As we proceed, it shifts its place,  
 And where we looked for crowns to fall,  
 We find the tug 's to come,—that 's all.

## II

At first you say, "The whole, or chief  
 Of difficulties, is belief. 30  
 Could I believe once thoroughly,  
 The rest were simple. What? Am I  
 An idiot, do you think,—a beast?  
 Prove to me, only that the least  
 Command of God is God's indeed, 35  
 And what injunction shall I need  
 To pay obedience? Death so nigh,  
 When time must end, eternity  
 Begin,—and cannot I compute,  
 Weigh loss and gain together, suit 40  
 My actions to the balance drawn,  
 And give my body to be sawn  
 Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied  
 To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,  
 Like any martyr of the list? 45  
 How gladly!—if I make acquist,



Through the brief minute's fierce annoy,  
Of God's eternity of joy."

## III

—And certainly you name the point  
Whereon all turns: for could you joint 50  
This flexile finite life once tight  
Into the fixed and infinite,  
You, safe inside, would spurn what 's out,  
With carelessness enough, no doubt—  
Would spurn mere life: but when time brings 55  
To their next stage your reasonings,  
Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink  
Nor see the path so well, I think.

## IV

You say, "Faith may be, one agrees,  
A touchstone for God's purposes, 60  
Even as ourselves conceive of them.  
Could he acquit us or condemn  
For holding what no hand can loose,  
Rejecting when we can't but choose?  
As well award the victor's wreath 65  
To whosoever should take breath  
Duly each minute while he lived—  
Grant heaven, because a man contrived  
To see its sunlight every day  
He walked forth on the public way. 70  
You must mix some uncertainty  
With faith, if you would have faith be.  
Why, what but faith, do we abhor  
And idolize each other for—  
Faith in our evil or our good, 75  
Which is or is not understood  
Aright by those we love or those  
We hate, thence called our friends or foes?  
Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,  
When, turning from the ugly face, 80

59-61. Extreme Protestants have emphasized salvation through faith rather than through meritorious works.

71-2. Cf. "Bishop Blougram's Apology," 634 and note.

I found belief in it too hard;  
 And she and I have our reward.  
 —Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us  
 Weak beings, to go using thus  
 A touchstone for our little ends, 85  
 Trying with faith the foes and friends;  
 —But God, bethink you! I would fain  
 Conceive of the Creator's reign  
 As based upon exacter laws  
 Than creatures build by with applause. 90  
 In all God's acts—(as Plato cries  
 He doth)—he should geometrize.  
 Whence, I desiderate . . ."

## V

I see!  
 You would grow as a natural tree,  
 Stand as a rock, soar up like fire. 95  
 The world 's so perfect and entire,  
 Quite above faith, so right and fit!  
 Go there, walk up and down in it!  
 No. The creation travails, groans—  
 Contrive your music from its moans, 100  
 Without or let or hindrance, friend!  
 That 's an old story, and its end  
 As old—you come back (be sincere)  
 With every question you put here  
 (Here where there once was, and is still, 105  
 We think, a living oracle,  
 Whose answers you stand carping at)  
 This time flung back unanswered flat,—

91-2. Cf. Jeans, Sir James, *The Mysterious Universe* (New Rev. Ed. New York and London, 1932, p. 160), "Plutarch records that Plato used to say that God for ever geometrises." Jeans endorses this view (p. 165); "from the intrinsic evidence of his creature, the Great Architect of the Universe now begins to appear as a pure mathematician." Cf. Plato's *Timaeus* and Plutarch's *Symposiacs*, VIII, 2.

96-100. Browning did not place a high value on perfection. In Browning's view, life is a struggle towards perfection, and, in striving, man grows in moral stature. He concludes that the world, with all its imperfections, is a fit scene for man's development, which it would not be if it were perfect, because then it would be so out of tune with man as to offer him no challenge. Cf. "Reverie," 203-5.

Beside, perhaps, as many more  
 As those that drove you out before, 110  
 Now added, where was little need.  
 Questions impossible, indeed,  
 To us who sat still, all and each  
 Persuaded that our earth had speech,  
 Of God's, writ down, no matter if 115  
 In cursive type or hieroglyph,—  
 Which one fact freed us from the yoke  
 Of guessing why He never spoke  
 You come back in no better plight  
 Than when you left us,—am I right? 120

## VI

So, the old process, I conclude,  
 Goes on, the reasoning 's pursued  
 Further. You own, "'T is well averred,  
 A scientific faith 's absurd,  
 —Frustrates the very end 't was meant 125  
 To serve. So, I would rest content  
 With a mere probability,  
 But, probable; the chance must lie  
 Clear on one side,—lie all in rough,  
 So long as there be just enough 130  
 To pin my faith to, though it hap  
 Only at points: from gap to gap  
 One hangs up a huge curtain so,  
 Grandly, nor seeks to have it go  
 Foldless and flat along the wall. 135  
 What care I if some interval  
 Of life less plainly may depend  
 On God? I'd hang there to the end;  
 And thus I should not find it hard  
 To be a Christian and debarred 140  
 From trailing on the earth, till furled  
 Away by death.—Renounce the world!  
 Were that a mighty hardship? Plan

123. Cf. E. J. Watkin, *Catholic Art and Culture* (New York, 1944), p. 190, "Romanticism denies reason, the foundation upon which religious faith must build." In this sense even the Pope in *The Ring and the Book* is a romantic, expressing Browning's views.

|  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| A pleasant life, and straight some man<br>Beside you, with, if he thought fit,<br>Abundant means to compass it,<br>Shall turn deliberate aside<br>To try and live as, if you tried<br>You clearly might, yet most despise.<br>One friend of mine wears out his eyes,<br>Slighting the stupid joys of sense,<br>In patient hope that, ten years hence,<br>'Somewhat completer,' he may say,<br>'My list of <i>coleopteral</i> '   | 145                             |
| While just the other who most laughs<br>At him, above all epitaphs<br>Aspires to have his tomb describe<br>Himself as sole among the tribe<br>Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed<br>A Grignon with the Regent's crest.<br>So that, subduing, as you want,<br>Whatever stands predominant<br>Among my earthly appetites<br>For tastes and smells and sounds and sights,<br>I shall be doing that alone,<br>To gain a palm-branch and a throne.<br>Which fifty people undertake<br>To do, and gladly, for the sake<br>Of giving a Semitic guess,<br>Or playing pawns at blindfold chess." | 150<br>155<br>160<br>165<br>170 |

## VII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Good: and the next thing is,—look round<br>For evidence enough! 'T is found,<br>No doubt: as is your sort of mind,<br>So is your sort of search: you 'll find<br>What you desire, and that 's to be | 175 |
|---|-----|

154. *Coleoptera*: an order of insects including the beetles.

160. *Grignon with the Regent's crest*: snuff-box made by Pierre Grignon (1723-1784) with the crest of the Duke of Orleans when he was acting as Regent.

169. *Semitic guess*: a guess concerning the meaning of a text written in a language like Hebrew.

170. *Blindfold chess*: chess in which the players cannot see the board.

A Christian. What says history?  
 How comforting a point it were  
 To find some mummy-scrap declare  
 There lived a Moses! Better still,  
 Prove Jonah's whale translatable 180  
 Into some quicksand of the seas,  
 Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,  
 That faith might flap her wings and crow  
 From such an eminence! Or, no—  
 The human heart 's best; you prefer 185  
 Making that prove the minister  
 To truth; you probe its wants and needs,  
 And hopes and fears, then try what creeds  
 Meet these most aptly,—resolute  
 That faith plucks such substantial fruit 190  
 Wherever these two correspond,  
 She little needs to look beyond,  
 And puzzle out who Orpheus was,  
 Or Dionysius Zagrias.  
 You 'll find sufficient, as I say, 195  
 To satisfy you either way;  
 You wanted to believe; your pains  
 Are crowned—you do: and what remains?  
 "Renounce the world!"—Ah, were it done  
 By merely cutting one by one 200  
 Your limbs off, with your wise head last,  
 How easy were it!—how soon past,  
 If once in the believing mood!  
 "Such is man's usual gratitude,  
 Such thanks to God do we return, 205  
 For not exacting that we spurn  
 A single gift of life, forego  
 One real gain,—only taste them so  
 With gravity and temperance,

180. *Jonah's whale translatable*: by interpreters refusing to accept literally the story of Jonah.

193. *Orpheus*: son of Apollo and mythological personification of music. The Orphic mysteries have been compared with Christianity.

194. *Dionysius Zagrias*: Bacchus the Sufferer, whose story is in some ways parallel to that of Christ. Browning is sarcastic at the theory that the Bible, like Greek religion, embodies mythological expression of the interests of the human heart.

That those mild virtues may enhance 210  
 Such pleasures, rather than abstract—  
 Last spice of which, will be the fact  
 Of love discerned in every gift;  
 While, when the scene of life shall shift,  
 And the gay heart be taught to ache, 215  
 As sorrows and privations take  
 The place of joy,—the thing that seems  
 Mere misery, under human schemes,  
 Becomes, regarded by the light  
 Of love, as very near, or quite 220  
 As good a gift as joy before.  
 So plain is it that, all the more  
 A dispensation 's merciful,  
 More pettishly we try and cull  
 Briers, thistles, from our private plot, 225  
 To mar God's ground where thorns are not!"

## VIII

Do you say this, or I?—Oh, you!  
 Then, what, my friend?—(thus I pursue  
 Our parley)—you indeed opine  
 That the Eternal and Divine 230  
 Did, eighteen centuries ago,  
 In very truth . . . Enough! you know  
 The all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,  
 That Life, that Death! And all, the earth  
 Shuddered at,—all, the heavens grew black 235  
 Rather than see; all, nature's rack  
 And throe at dissolution's brink  
 Attested,—all took place, you think,  
 Only to give our joys a zest,  
 And prove our sorrows for the best? 240  
 We differ, then! Were I, still pale

227. Browning may well ask this question, for he does seem to assume a similar attitude in the rest of his poetry, where he is less Puritanical. The austere mood of this one poem may be accounted for by the recent death of his mother. Even his wife, who had influenced him to express these views, complained of what she called the *asceticism* of "Easter-Day." (*Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Kenyon, 1897, I, 449.)

And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,  
 Waiting to hear God's voice declare  
 What horror followed for my share,  
 As implicated in the deed, 245  
 Apart from other sins,—concede  
 That if He blacked out in a blot  
 My brief life's pleasantness, 't were not  
 So very disproportionate!  
 Or there might be another fate— 250  
 I certainly could understand  
 (If fancies were the thing in hand)  
 How God might save, at that day's price,  
 The impure in their impurities,  
 Give licence formal and complete 255  
 To choose the fair and pick the sweet.  
 But there be certain words, broad, plain,  
 Uttered again and yet again,  
 Hard to mistake or overgloss—  
 Announcing this world's gain for loss, 260  
 And bidding us reject the same:  
 The whole world lieth (they proclaim)  
 In wickedness,—come out of it!  
 Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,  
 But I who thrill through every nerve 265  
 At thought of what deaf ears deserve—  
 How do you counsel in the case?

## IX

"I 'd take, by all means, in your place,  
 The safe side, since it so appears:  
 Deny myself, a few brief years, 270  
 The natural pleasure, leave the fruit  
 Or cut the plant up by the root.  
 Remember what a martyr said  
 On the rude tablet overhead!  
 'I was born sickly, poor and mean, 275  
 A slave: no misery could screen

245-9. Cf. the doctrine of Original Sin stressed by the sect to which Browning's family belonged, with its assumption that all men were implicated in the sin of Adam, and, so far as their own merits are concerned, already deserve damnation as soon as they are born.

The holders of the pearl of price  
 From Cæsar's envy; therefore twice  
 I fought with beasts, and three times saw  
 My children suffer by his law; 280  
 At last my own release was earned:  
 I was some time in being burned,  
 But at the close a Hand came through  
 The fire above my head, and drew  
 My soul to Christ, whom now I see. 285  
 Sergius, a brother, writes for me  
 This testimony on the wall—  
 For me, I have forgot it all.  
 You say right; this were not so hard!  
 And since one nowise is debarred 290  
 From this, why not escape some sins  
 By such a method?"

## X

Then begins  
 To the old point revulsion new—  
 (For 't is just this I bring you to)  
 If after all we should mistake, 295  
 And so renounce life for the sake  
 Of death and nothing else? You hear  
 Each friend we jeered at, send the jeer  
 Back to ourselves with good effect—  
 "There were my beetles to collect! 300  
 My box—a trifle, I confess,  
 But here I hold it, ne'ertheless!"  
 Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart  
 And answer) we, the better part  
 Have chosen, though 't were only hope,— 305  
 Nor envy moles like you that grope  
 Amid your veritable muck,  
 More than the grasshoppers would truck,  
 For yours, their passionate life away,  
 That spends itself in leaps all day 310  
 To reach the sun, you want the eyes  
 To see, as they the wings to rise

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303-7. Browning answers his opponents by plucking up heart to jeer at them as idiots, blind as moles groping in manure.



And match the noble hearts of them!  
 Thus the contemner we contemn,—  
 And, when doubt strikes us, thus we ward 315  
 Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,  
 —Not struck enough to overturn  
 Our faith, but shake it—make us learn  
 What I began with, and, I wis,  
 End, having proved,—how hard it is 320  
 To be a Christian!

## XI

“Proved, or not,  
 Howe’er you wis, small thanks, I wot,  
 You get of mine, for taking pains  
 To make it hard to me. Who gains  
 By that, I wonder? Here I live 325  
 In trusting ease; and here you drive  
 At causing me to lose what most  
 Yourself would mourn for had you lost!”

## XII

But, do you see, my friend, that thus  
 You leave Saint Paul for Æschylus? 330  
 —Who made his Titan’s arch-device  
 The giving men *blind hopes* to spice  
 The meal of life with, else devoured  
 In bitter haste, while lo, death loured  
 Before them at the platter’s edge! 335  
 If faith should be, as I allege,  
 Quite other than a condiment  
 To heighten flavour with, or meant  
 (Like that brave curry of his Grace)  
 To take at need the victuals’ place? 340  
 If, having dined, you would digest  
 Besides, and turning to your rest  
 Should find instead . . .

320–21. Browning makes clearer his view that faith, not works, is the essential problem for the Christian.

322. *Wis*; *wot*: think.

330. Leave the faith of St. Paul for the “blind hopes” given to Man, according to Æschylus, by the Titan Prometheus.

## XIII

Now, you shall see  
 And judge if a mere foppery  
 Pricks on my speaking! I resolve 345  
 To utter—yes, it shall devolve  
 On you to hear as solemn, strange  
 And dread a thing as in the range  
 Of facts,—or fancies, if God will—  
 E'er happened to our kind! I still 350  
 Stand in the cloud and, while it wraps  
 My face, ought not to speak perhaps;  
 Seeing that if I carry through  
 My purpose, if my words in you  
 Find a live actual listener, 355  
 My story, reason must aver  
 False after all—the happy chance!  
 While, if each human countenance  
 I meet in London day by day,  
 Be what I fear,—my warnings fray 360  
 No one, and no one they convert,  
 And no one helps me to assert  
 How hard it is to really be  
 A Christian, and in vacancy  
 I pour this story!

## XIV

I commence 365  
 By trying to inform you, whence  
 It comes that every Easter-night  
 As now, I sit up, watch, till light,  
 Upon those chimney-stacks and roofs,  
 Give, through my window-pane, grey proofs 370  
 That Easter-day is breaking slow.  
 On such a night three years ago,  
 It chanced that I had cause to cross  
 The common, where the chapel was,  
 Our friend spoke of, the other day— 375  
 You 've not forgotten, I dare say.

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360. According to the extreme Protestant tradition, most men do not have enough faith or grace to be saved.

I fell to musing of the time  
 So close, the blessed matin-prime  
 All hearts leap up at, in some guise—  
 One could not well do otherwise. 380  
 Insensibly my thoughts were bent  
 Toward the main point, I overwent  
 Much the same ground of reasoning  
 As you and I just now. One thing  
 Remained, however—one that tasked 385  
 My soul to answer; and I asked,  
 Fairly and frankly, what might be  
 That History, that Faith, to me  
 —Me there—not me in some domain  
 Built up and peopled by my brain, 390  
 Weighing its merits as one weighs  
 Mere theories for blame or praise,  
 —The kingcraft of the Lucumons,  
 Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons,—  
 But my faith there, or none at all. 395  
 "How were my case, now, did I fall  
 Dead here, this minute—should I lie  
 Faithful or faithless?" Note that I  
 Inclined thus ever!—little prone  
 For instance, when I lay alone 400  
 In childhood, to go calm to sleep  
 And leave a closet where might keep  
 His watch perdue some murderer  
 Waiting till twelve o'clock to stir,  
 As good authentic legends tell: 405  
 "He might: but how improbable!  
 How little likely to deserve  
 The pains and trial to the nerve  
 Of thrusting head into the dark!"—  
 Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark 410

393. *Lucumons*: Etruscan patriarchs, whose "kingcraft" may have influenced the Roman rulers.

394. *Fourier's scheme*: the socialism of François Fourier (1772-1837). Browning felt that the weighing of evidence appropriate to other subjects concerned with history and human conduct should not be tolerated in dealing with "That History" in the Bible, which must be accepted literally, "all or none."

Beside, that, should the dreadful scout  
 Really lie hid there, and leap out  
 At first turn of the rusty key,  
 Mine were small gain that she could see,  
 Killed not in bed but on the floor, 415  
 And losing one night's sleep the more.  
 I tell you, I would always burst  
 The door ope, know my fate at first.  
 This time, indeed, the closet penned  
 No such assassin: but a friend 420  
 Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit  
 For counsel, Common Sense, to wit,  
 Who said a good deal that might pass,—  
 Heartening, impartial too, it was,  
 Judge else: "For, soberly now,—who 425  
 Should be a Christian if not you?"  
 (Hear how he smoothed me down.) "One takes  
 A whole life, sees what course it makes  
 Mainly, and not by fits and starts—  
 In spite of stoppage which imparts 430  
 Fresh value to the general speed.  
 A life, with none, would fly indeed:  
 Your progressing is slower—right!  
 We deal with progress and not flight.  
 Through baffling senses passionate, 435  
 Fancies as restless,—with a freight  
 Of knowledge cumbersome enough  
 To sink your ship when waves grow rough,  
 Though meant for ballast in the hold,—  
 I find, 'mid dangers manifold, 440  
 The good bark answers to the helm  
 Where faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm  
 Than some stout peasant's heavenly guide,  
 Whose hard head could not, if it tried,  
 Conceive a doubt, nor understand 445  
 How senses hornier than his hand  
 Should 'tice the Christian off his guard.  
 More happy! But shall we award  
 Less honour to the hull which, dogged

By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged, 450  
 Masts by the board, her bulwarks gone  
 And stanchions going, yet bears on,—  
 Than to mere life-boats, built to save,  
 And triumph o'er the breaking wave?  
 Make perfect your good ship as these, 455  
 And what were her performances!"  
 I added—"Would the ship reach home!  
 I wish indeed 'God's kingdom come—'  
 The day when I shall see appear  
 His bidding, as my duty, clear 460  
 From doubt! And it shall dawn, that day,  
 Some future season; Easter may  
 Prove, not impossibly, the time—  
 Yes, that were striking—fates would chime  
 So aptly! Easter-morn, to bring 465  
 The Judgment!—deeper in the spring  
 Than now, however, when there 's snow  
 Capping the hills; for earth must show  
 All signs of meaning to pursue  
 Her tasks as she was wont to do 470  
 —The skylark, taken by surprise  
 As we ourselves, shall recognize  
 Sudden the end. For suddenly  
 It comes; the dreadfulness must be  
 In that; all warrants the belief— 475  
 'At night it cometh like a thief.'  
 I fancy why the trumpet blows;  
 —Plainly, to wake one. From repose  
 We shall start up, at last awake  
 From life, that insane dream we take 480  
 For waking now, because it seems.  
 And as, when now we wake from dreams,  
 We laugh, while we recall them, 'Fool,  
 To let the chance slip, linger cool  
 When such adventure offered! Just 485  
 A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust  
 Aside, a wicked mage to stab—  
 And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab!'

476. See 2 Peter iii, 10.

488. *Queen Mab*: a fairy mentioned in *Romeo and Juliet*, I, iv, 54 ff.

So shall we marvel why we grudged  
 Our labour here, and idly judged 490  
 Of heaven, we might have gained, but losel  
 Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse  
 To plead at all! You speak no worse  
 Nor better than my ancient nurse  
 When she would tell me in my youth 495  
 I well deserved that shapes uncouth  
 Frighted and teased me in my sleep:  
 Why could I not in memory keep  
 Her precept for the evil's cure?  
 'Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure 500  
 You 'll wake forthwith!' "

## XV

And as I said  
 This nonsense, throwing back my head  
 With light complacent laugh, I found  
 Suddenly all the midnight round  
 One fire. The dome of heaven had stood 505  
 As made up of a multitude  
 Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack  
 Of ripples infinite and black,  
 From sky to sky. Sudden there went,  
 Like horror and astonishment, 510  
 A fierce vindictive scribble of red  
 Quick flame across, as if one said  
 (The angry scribe of Judgment) "There—  
 Burn it!" And straight I was aware  
 That the whole ribwork round, minute 515  
 Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,  
 Was tinted, each with its own spot  
 Of burning at the core, till clot  
 Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire  
 Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire 520  
 As fanned to measure equable,—  
 Just so great conflagrations kill  
 Night overhead, and rise and sink,  
 Reflected. Now the fire would shrink  
 And wither off the blasted face 525  
 Of heaven, and I distinct might trace

The sharp black ridgy outlines left  
 Unburned like network—then, each cleft  
 The fire had been sucked back into,  
 Regorged, and out it surging flew 530  
 Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,  
 Till, tolerating to be tamed  
 No longer, certain rays world-wide  
 Shot downwardly. On every side  
 Caught past escape, the earth was lit, 535  
 As if a dragon's nostril split  
 And all his famished ire o'erflowed;  
 Then, as he winced at his lord's goad,  
 Back he inhaled: whereat I found  
 The clouds into vast pillars bound, 540  
 Based on the corners of the earth,  
 Propping the skies at top: a dearth  
 Of fire i' the violet intervals,  
 Leaving exposed the utmost walls  
 Of time, about to tumble in 545  
 And end the world.

## XVI

I felt begin  
 The Judgment-Day: to retrocede  
 Was too late now. "In very deed,"  
 (I uttered to myself) "that Day!"  
 The intuition burned away 550  
 All darkness from my spirit too:  
 There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,  
 Choosing the world. The choice was made:  
 And naked and disguiseless stayed,  
 And unevadable, the fact. 555  
 My brain held all the same compact  
 Its senses, nor my heart declined  
 Its office; rather, both combined  
 To help me in this juncture. I  
 Lost not a second,—agony 560  
 Gave boldness: since my life had end  
 And my choice with it—best defend,  
 Applaud both! I resolved to say,  
 "So was I framed by thee, such way

I put to use thy senses here! 565  
 It was so beautiful, so near,  
 Thy world,—what could I then but choose  
 My part there? Nor did I refuse  
 To look above the transient boon  
 Of time; but it was hard so soon 570  
 As in a short life, to give up  
 Such beauty: I could put the cup,  
 Undrained of half its fulness, by;  
 But, to renounce it utterly,  
 —That was too hard! Nor did the cry 575  
 Which bade renounce it, touch my brain  
 Authentically deep and plain  
 Enough to make my lips let go.  
 But Thou, who knowest all, dost know  
 Whether I was not, life's brief while, 580  
 Endeavouring to reconcile  
 Those lips (too tardily, alas!)  
 To letting the dear remnant pass,  
 One day,—some drops of earthly good  
 Untasted! Is it for this mood, 585  
 That Thou, whose earth delights so well,  
 Hast made its complement a hell?"

## XVII

A final belch of fire like blood,  
 Overbroke all heaven in one flood  
 Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky 590  
 Fire, and both, one brief ecstasy,  
 Then ashes. But I heard no noise  
 (Whatever was) because a voice  
 Beside me spoke thus, "Life is done,  
 Time ends, Eternity's begun, 595  
 And thou art judged for evermore."

## XVIII

I looked up; all seemed as before;  
 Of that cloud-Tophet overhead

566-78. Browning usually does not recommend a complete renunciation of the world. Cf. "The Guardian Angel," 33-5.

598. *Tophet*: place of burning.



No trace was left: I saw instead  
 The common round me, and the sky 600  
 Above, stretched drear and emptily  
 Of life. 'T was the last watch of night,  
 Except what brings the morning quite;  
 When the armed angel, conscience-clear,  
 His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear 605  
 And gazes on the earth he guards,  
 Safe one night more through all its wards,  
 Till God relieve him at his post.  
 "A dream—a waking dream at most!"  
 (I spoke out quick, that I might shake 610  
 The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)  
 "The world gone, yet the world is here?  
 Are not all things as they appear?  
 Is Judgment past for me alone?  
 —And where had place the great white throne? 615  
 The rising of the quick and dead?  
 Where stood they, small and great? Who read  
 The sentence from the opened book?"  
 So, by degrees, the blood forsook  
 My heart, and let it beat afresh; 620  
 I knew I should break through the mesh  
 Of horror, and breathe presently:  
 When, lo, again, the voice by me!

## XIX

I saw . . . Oh brother, 'mid far sands  
 The palm-tree-cinctured city stands, 625  
 Bright-white beneath, as heaven, bright-blue,  
 Leans o'er it, while the years pursue  
 Their course, unable to abate  
 Its paradisal laugh at fate!  
 One morn,—the Arab staggers blind 630  
 O'er a new tract of death, calcined  
 To ashes, silence, nothingness,—  
 And strives, with dizzy wits, to guess  
 Whence fell the blow. What if, 'twixt skies  
 And prostrate earth, he should surprise 635

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615. See Revelation xx, 11.

The imaged vapour, head to foot,  
 Surveying, motionless and mute,  
 Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt  
 It vanish up again?—So hapt  
 My chance. HE stood there. Like the smoke 640  
 Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke,—  
 I saw Him. One magnificent pall  
 Mantled in massive fold and fall  
 His head, and coiled in snaky swathes  
 About His feet: night's black, that bathes 645  
 All else, broke, grizzled with despair,  
 Against the soul of blackness there.  
 A gesture told the mood within—  
 That wrapped right hand which based the chin,  
 That intense meditation fixed 650  
 On His procedure,—pity mixed  
 With the fulfilment of decree.  
 Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,  
 Who fell before His feet, a mass,  
 No man now.

## XX

"All is come to pass. 655  
 Such shows are over for each soul  
 They had respect to. In the roll  
 Of Judgment which convinced mankind  
 Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,  
 Terror must burn the truth into: 660  
 Their fate for them!—thou hadst to do  
 With absolute omnipotence,  
 Able its judgments to dispense  
 To the whole race, as every one  
 Were its sole object. Judgment done, 665  
 God is, thou art,—the rest is hurled  
 To nothingness for thee. This world,  
 This finite life, thou hast preferred,  
 In disbelief of God's plain word,  
 To heaven and to infinity. 670  
 Here the probation was for thee,

To show thy soul the earthly mixed  
 With heavenly, it must choose betwixt.  
 The earthly joys lay palpable,—  
 A taint, in each, distinct as well; 675  
 The heavenly flitted, faint and rare,  
 Above them, but as truly were  
 Taintless, so, in their nature, best.  
 Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest  
 'T was fitter spirit should subserve 680  
 The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve  
 Beneath the spirit's play. Advance  
 No claim to their inheritance  
 Who chose the spirit's fugitive  
 Brief gleams, and yearned, 'This were to live 685  
 Indeed, if rays, completely pure  
 From flesh that dulls them, could endure,—  
 Not shoot in meteor-light athwart  
 Our earth, to show how cold and swart  
 It lies beneath their fire, but stand 690  
 As stars do, destined to expand,  
 Prove veritable worlds, our home!  
 Thou saidst,—'Let spirit star the dome  
 Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,  
 No nook of earth,—I shall not seek 695  
 Its service further!' Thou art shut  
 Out of the heaven of spirit; glut  
 Thy sense upon the world: 't is thine  
 For ever—take it!"

## XXI

"How? Is mine,  
 The world?" (I cried, while my soul broke 700  
 Out in a transport.) "Hast Thou spoke  
 Plainly in that? Earth's exquisite  
 Treasures of wonder and delight,  
 For me?"

671-3. Cf. *The Ring and the Book*, "The Pope," 1436-7.  
 Life is probation and the earth no goal  
 But starting-point of man.

## XXII

The austere voice returned,—  
 “So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned 705  
 What God accounteth happiness,  
 Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess  
 What hell may be his punishment  
 For those who doubt if God invent  
 Better than they. Let such men rest 710  
 Content with what they judged the best.  
 Let the unjust usurp at will:  
 The filthy shall be filthy still:  
 Miser, there waits the gold for thee!  
 Hater, indulge thine enmity! 715  
 And thou, whose heaven self-ordained  
 Was, to enjoy earth unrestrained,  
 Do it! Take all the ancient show!  
 The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,  
 And men apparently pursue 720  
 Their works, as they were wont to do,  
 While living in probation yet.  
 I promise not thou shalt forget  
 The past, now gone to its account;  
 But leave thee with the old amount 725  
 Of faculties, nor less nor more,  
 Unvisited, as heretofore,  
 By God’s free spirit, that makes an end.  
 So, once more, take thy world! Expend  
 Eternity upon its shows, 730  
 Flung thee as freely as one rose  
 Out of a summer’s opulence,  
 Over the Eden-barrier whence  
 Thou art excluded. Knock in vain!”

## XXIII

I sat up. All was still again. 735  
 I breathed free: to my heart, back fled  
 The warmth. “But, all the world!”—I said.  
 I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,

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708 ff. This conception of Hell is developed by Bernard Shaw in *Man and Superman*, III.

And recollected I might learn  
 From books, how many myriad sorts 740  
 Of fern exist, to trust reports,  
 Each as distinct and beautiful  
 As this, the very first I cull.  
 Think, from the first leaf to the last!  
 Conceive, then, earth's resources! Vast 745  
 Exhaustless beauty, endless change  
 Of wonder! And this foot shall range  
 Alps, Andes,—and this eye devour  
 The bee-bird and the aloe-flower?

## XXIV

Then the voice: "Welcome so to rate 750  
 The arras-folds that variegate  
 The earth, God's antechamber, well!  
 The wise, who waited there, could tell  
 By these, what royalties in store  
 Lay one step past the entrance-door. 755  
 For whom, was reckoned, not too much,  
 This life's munificence? For such  
 As thou,—a race, whereof scarce one  
 Was able, in a million,  
 To feel that any marvel lay 760  
 In objects round his feet all day;  
 Scarce one, in many millions more,  
 Willing, if able, to explore  
 The secreter, minuter charm!  
 —Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm 765  
 Of power to cope with God's intent,—  
 Or scared if the south firmament  
 With north-fire did its wings reflodge!  
 All partial beauty was a pledge  
 Of beauty in its plenitude: 770  
 But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,  
 Retain it! plenitude be theirs  
 Who looked above!"

749. *Bee-bird*: tropical humming-bird.

769-770. This is one of the central doctrines in Browning's thought.

## XXV

Though sharp despairs  
 Shot through me, I held up, bore on.  
 "What matter though my trust were gone 775  
 From natural things? Henceforth my part  
 Be less with nature than with art!  
 For art supplants, gives mainly worth  
 To nature; 't is man stamps the earth—  
 And I will seek his impress, seek 780  
 The statuary of the Greek,  
 Italy's painting—there my choice  
 Shall fix!"

## XXVI

"Obtain it!" said the voice,  
 "—The one form with its single act,  
 Which sculptors laboured to abstract, 785  
 The one face, painters tried to draw,  
 With its one look, from throngs they saw.  
 And that perfection in their soul,  
 These only hinted at? The whole,  
 They were but parts of? What each laid 790  
 His claim to glory on?—afraid  
 His fellow-men should give him rank  
 By mere tentatives which he shrank  
 Smitten at heart from, all the more,  
 That gazers pressed in to adore! 795  
 'Shall I be judged by only these?'  
 If such his soul's capacities,  
 Even while he trod the earth,—think, now,  
 What pomp in Buonarroti's brow,  
 With its new palace-brain where dwells 800  
 Superb the soul, unvexed by cells  
 That crumbled with the transient clay!  
 What visions will his right hand's sway  
 Still turn to forms, as still they burst  
 Upon him? How will he quench thirst, 805

777-782. In general, Browning treats "Italy's paintings" and other products of human art as of higher interest than "natural things."

799. *Buonarroti*: Michelangelo, Italian artist (1475-1564).

Titanically infantine,  
 Laid at the breast of the Divine?  
 Does it confound thee,—this first page  
 Emblazoning man's heritage?—  
 Can this alone absorb thy sight, 810  
 As pages were not infinite,—  
 Like the omnipotence which tasks  
 Itself to furnish all that asks  
 The soul it means to satiate?  
 What was the world, the starry state 815  
 Of the broad skies,—what, all displays  
 Of power and beauty intermixed,  
 Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—  
 What else than needful furniture  
 For life's first stage? God's work, be sure, 820  
 No more spreads wasted, than falls scant!  
 He filled, did not exceed, man's want  
 Of beauty in this life. But through  
 Life pierce,—and what has earth to do,  
 Its utmost beauty's appanage, 825  
 With the requirement of next stage?  
 Did God pronounce earth 'very good'?  
 Needs must it be, while understood  
 For man's preparatory state;  
 Naught here to heighten nor abate; 830  
 Transfer the same completeness here,  
 To swerve a new state's use,—and drear  
 Deficiency gapes every side!  
 The good, tried once, were bad, retried.  
 See the enwrapping rocky niche, 835  
 Sufficient for the sleep in which  
 The lizard breathes for ages safe:  
 Split the mould—and as light would chafe  
 The creature's new world-widened sense,  
 Dazzled to death at evidence 840  
 Of all the sounds and sights that broke  
 Innumerable at the chisel's stroke,—  
 So, in God's eye, the earth's first stuff  
 Was, neither more nor less, enough

To house man's soul, man's need fulfil. 845  
Man reckoned it immeasurable?  
So thinks the lizard of his vault!  
Could God be taken in default,  
Short of contrivances, by you,—  
Or reached, ere ready to pursue 850  
His progress through eternity?  
That chambered rock, the lizard's world,  
Your easy mallet's blow has hurled  
To nothingness for ever; so,  
Has God abolished at a blow 855  
This world, wherein his saints were pent,—  
Who, though found grateful and content,  
With the provision there, as thou,  
Yet knew he would not disallow  
Their spirit's hunger, felt as well,— 860  
Unsated,—not unsatable,  
As paradise gives proof. Deride  
Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside!"

## XXVII

I cried in anguish, "Mind, the mind,  
So miserably cast behind, 865  
To gain what had been wisely lost!  
Oh, let me strive to make the most  
Of the poor stunted soul, I nipped  
Of budding wings, else now equipped  
For voyage from summer isle to isle! 870  
And though she needs must reconcile  
Ambition to the life on ground,  
Still, I can profit by late found  
But precious knowledge. Mind is best—  
I will seize mind, forego the rest, 875  
And try how far my tethered strength  
May crawl in this poor breadth and length.  
Let me, since I can fly no more,  
At least spin dervish-like about  
(Till giddy rapture almost doubt 880  
I fly) through circling sciences,  
Philosophies and histories!  
Should the whirl slacken there, then verse,



Fining to music, shall asperse  
 Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain 885  
 Intoxicate, half-break my chain!  
 Not joyless, though more favoured feet  
 Stand calm, where I want wings to beat  
 The floor. At least earth's bond is broke!"

## XXVIII

Then (sickening even while I spoke) 890  
 "Let me alone! No answer, pray,  
 To this! I know what Thou wilt say!  
 All still is earth's,—to know, as much  
 As feel its truths, which if we touch  
 With sense, or apprehend in soul, 895  
 What matter? I have reached the goal—  
 'Whereto does knowledge serve!' will burn  
 My eyes, too sure, at every turn!  
 I cannot look back now, nor stake  
 Bliss on the race, for running's sake. 900  
 The goal's a ruin like the rest!—  
 And so much worse thy latter quest,"  
 (Added the voice) "that even on earth—  
 Whenever, in man's soul, had birth  
 Those intuitions, grasps of guess, 905  
 Which pull the more into the less,  
 Making the finite comprehend  
 Infinity,—the bard would spend  
 Such praise alone, upon his craft,  
 As, when wind-lyres obey the waft, 910  
 Goes to the craftsman who arranged  
 The seven strings, changed them and rechanged—  
 Knowing it was the South that harped.  
 He felt his song, in singing, warped;  
 Distinguished his and God's part: whence 915  
 A world of spirit as of sense  
 Was plain to him, yet not too plain,  
 Which he could traverse, not remain  
 A guest in:—else were permanent  
 Heaven on the earth its gleams were meant 920  
 To sting with hunger for full light,—  
 Made visible in verse, despite

The veiling weakness,—truth by means  
 Of fable, showing while its screens,—  
 Since highest truth, man e'er supplied, 925  
 Was ever fable on outside.  
 Such gleams made bright the earth an age;  
 Now the whole sun 's his heritage!  
 Take up thy world, it is allowed,  
 Thou who hast entered in the cloud!" 930

## XXIX

Then I—"Behold, my spirit bleeds,  
 Catches no more at broken reeds,—  
 But lilies flower those reeds above:  
 I let the world go, and take love!  
 Love survives in me, albeit those 935  
 I love be henceforth masks and shows,  
 Not living men and women: still  
 I mind how love repaired all ill,  
 Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends  
 With parents, brothers, children, friends! 940  
 Some semblance of a woman yet  
 With eyes to help me to forget,  
 Shall look on me; and I will match  
 Departed love with love, attach  
 Old memories to new dreams, nor scorn 945  
 The poorest of the grains of corn  
 I save from shipwreck on this isle.  
 Trusting its barrenness may smile  
 With happy foodful green one day,  
 More precious for the pains. I pray,— 950  
 Leave to love, only!"

## XXX

At the word,  
 The form, I looked to have been stirred  
 With pity and approval, rose  
 O'er me, as when the headsman throws  
 Axe over shoulder to make end— 955  
 I fell prone, letting Him expend  
 His wrath, while thus the inflicting voice  
 Smote me. "Is this thy final choice?"

Love is the best? 'T is somewhat late!  
 And all thou dost enumerate 960  
 Of power and beauty in the world,  
 The mightiness of love was curled  
 Inextricably round about.  
 Love lay within it and without,  
 To clasp thee,—but in vain! Thy soul 965  
 Still shrunk from Him who made the whole  
 Still set deliberate aside  
 His love!—Now take love! Well betide  
 Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take  
 The show of love for the name's sake, 970  
 Remembering every moment Who,  
 Beside creating thee unto  
 These ends, and these for thee, was said  
 To undergo death in thy stead  
 In flesh like thine: so ran the tale. 975  
 What doubt in thee could countervail  
 Belief in it? Upon the ground  
 'That in the story had been found  
 Too much love! How could God love so?'  
 He who in all his works below 980  
 Adapted to the needs of man,  
 Made love the basis of the plan,—  
 Did love, as was demonstrated:  
 While man, who was so fit instead  
 To hate, as every day gave proof,— 985  
 Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,  
 Both could and did invent that scheme  
 Of perfect love: 't would well beseem  
 Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,  
 Not tally with God's usual ways!" 990

## XXXI

And I cowered deprecatingly—  
 "Thou Love of God! Or let me die,  
 Or grant what shall seem heaven almost!  
 Let me not know that all is lost,  
 Though lost it be—leave me not tied 995  
 To this despair, this corpse-like bride!  
 Let that old life seem mine—no more—

With limitation as before,  
 With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:  
 Be all the earth a wilderness! 1000  
 Only let me go on, go on,  
 Still hoping ever and anon  
 To reach one eve the Better Land!"

## XXXII

Then did the form expand, expand—  
 I knew Him through the dread disguise 1005  
 As the whole God within His eyes  
 Embraced me.

## XXXIII

When I lived again,  
 The day was breaking,—the gray plain  
 I rose from, silvered thick with dew.  
 Was this a vision? False or true? 1010  
 Since then, three varied years are spent,  
 And commonly my mind is bent  
 To think it was a dream—be sure  
 A mere dream and distemperature—  
 The last day's watching: then the night,— 1015  
 The shock of that strange Northern Light  
 Set my head swimming, bred in me  
 A dream. And so I live, you see,  
 Go through the world, try, prove, reject,  
 Prefer, still struggling to effect 1020  
 My warfare; happy that I can  
 Be crossed and thwarted as a man,  
 Not left in God's contempt apart,  
 With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,  
 Tame in earth's paddock as her prize. 1025  
 Thank God, she still each method tries  
 To catch me, who may yet escape,  
 She knows,—the fiend in angel's shapel  
 Thank God, no paradise stands barred  
 To entry, and I find it hard 1030  
 To be a Christian, as I said!  
 Still every now and then my head

Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows drear  
 Spite of the sunshine, while I fear  
 And think, "How dreadful to be grudged  
 No ease henceforth, as one that 's judged, 1035  
 Condemned to earth for ever, shut  
 From heaven!"

But Easter-Day breaks! But  
 Christ rises! Mercy every way  
 Is infinite,—and who can say? 1040

## LOVE AMONG THE RUINS\*

### I

WHERE the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles,  
 Miles and miles  
 On the solitary pastures where our sheep  
 Half-asleep  
 Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop 5  
 As they crop—  
 Was the site once of a city great and gay,  
 (So they say)  
 Of our country's very capital, its prince  
 Ages since 10  
 Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far  
 Peace or war.

### II

Now,—the country does not even boast a tree,  
 As you see,  
 To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills 15  
 From the hills

---

\* Possibly the scene is the Roman Campagna (cf. "Two in the Campagna"); but Rome never had a hundred gates. This ancient city seems more like Babylon, as described by Herodotus, with details drawn from the Apocalypse of St. John, and perhaps 1 Chronicles, xviii and xxi. The poem is a good example of very romantic Victorian poetry.

On New Year's, 1852, in Paris, Browning resolved to write a poem a day. On that day he wrote "Women and Roses," on the next, "Childe Roland," and on January 3 "Love Among the Ruins." Browning is the inventor of the beautiful meter used with success in the poem. It was published as the first poem in *Men and Women* (1855), the first volume of poetry (except *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day*, a theological discussion) published by Browning after his romantic marriage and removal to Italy.

Intersect and give a name to, (else they run  
     Into one)  
 Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires  
     Up like fires 20  
 O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall  
     Bounding all,  
 Made of marble, men might march on nor be pressed,  
     Twelve abreast.

## III

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass 25  
     Never was!  
 Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads  
     And embeds  
 Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,  
     Stock or stone— 30  
 Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe  
     Long ago;  
 Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame  
     Struck them tame;  
 And that glory and that shame alike, the gold 35  
     Bought and sold.

## IV

Now,—the single little turret that remains  
     On the plains,  
 By the caper overrooted, by the gourd  
     Overscored, 40  
 While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks  
     Through the chinks—  
 Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time  
     Sprang sublime,  
 And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced 45  
     As they raced,  
 And the monarch and his minions and his dames  
     Viewed the games.

---

39. *Caper*: a low prickly shrub.

## V

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve  
     Smiles to leave 50  
 To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece  
     In such peace,  
 And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey  
     Melt away—  
 That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair 55  
     Waits me there  
 In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul  
     For the goal,  
 When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb  
     Till I come. 60

## VI

But he looked upon the city, every side,  
     Far and wide,  
 All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'  
     Colonnades,  
 All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then, 65  
     All the men!  
 When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,  
     Either hand  
 On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace  
     Of my face, 70  
 Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech  
     Each on each.

## VII

In one year they sent a million fighters forth  
     South and North,  
 And they built their gods a brazen pillar high 75  
     As the sky,  
 Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force—  
     Gold, of course.  
 Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!  
     Earth's returns 80  
 For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!  
     Shut them in,  
 With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!  
     Love is best.

## A LOVERS' QUARREL\*

## I

OH, what a dawn of day!  
How the March sun feels like May!  
All is blue again  
After last night's rain,  
And the South dries the hawthorn-spray. 5  
Only, my Love's away!  
I 'd as lief that the blue were grey.

## II

Runnels, which rillels swell,  
Must be dancing down the dell,  
With a foaming head 10  
On the beryl bed  
Paven smooth as a hermit's cell;  
Each with a tale to tell,  
Could my Love but attend as well.

## III

Dearest, three months ago! 15  
When we lived blocked-up with snow,—  
When the wind would edge  
In and in his wedge,  
In, as far as the point could go—  
Not to our ingle, though, 20  
Where we loved each the other so!

## IV

Laughs with so little cause!  
We devised games out of straws.  
We would try and trace  
One another's face 25

---

\* It seems to the speaker that such a perfect union can not be destroyed by the sharp word that has divided them. This was published in *Men and Women* (1855), after the Brownings had been happily married for nine years. So far as we know, they never had a quarrel; but here Browning touches upon the two subjects in which he and his wife were in disagreement.



## A LOVERS' QUARREL

In the ash, as an artist draws;  
 Free on each other's flaws,  
 How we chattered like two church daws!

## V

What 's in the "Times"?—a scold  
 At the Emperor deep and cold; 30  
     He has taken a bride  
     To his gruesome side,  
 That 's as fair as himself is bold:  
     There they sit ermine-stoled,  
 And she powders her hair with gold. 35

## VI

Fancy the Pampas' sheen!  
 Miles and miles of gold and green  
     Where the sunflowers blow  
     In a solid glow,  
 And—to break now and then the screen— 40  
     Black neck and eyeballs keen,  
 Up a wild horse leaps between!

## VII

Try, will our table turn?  
 Lay your hands there light, and yearn  
     Till the yearning slips 45  
     Thro' the finger-tips  
 In a fire which a few discern,  
     And a very few feel burn,  
 And the rest, they may live and learn!

## VIII

Then we would up and pace, 50  
 For a change, about the place,  
     Each with arm o'er neck:  
     'T is our quarter-deck,  
 We are seamen in woeful case.  
     Help in the ocean-space! 55  
 Or, if no help, we 'll embrace.

---

31. The Emperor Napoleon III was married on January 30, 1853. Browning did not share his wife's admiration for the Emperor.

## IX

See, how she looks now, dressed  
In a sledging-cap and vest!  
'T is a huge fur cloak—  
Like a reindeer's yoke 60  
Falls the lappet along the breast:  
Sleeves for her arms to rest,  
Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

## X

Teach me to flirt a fan  
As the Spanish ladies can, 65  
Or I tint your lip  
With a burnt stick's tip  
And you turn into such a man!  
Just the two spots that span  
Half the bill of the young male swan. 70

## XI

Dearest, three months ago  
When the mesmerizer Snow  
With his hand's first sweep  
Put the earth to sleep:  
'T was a time when the heart could show 75  
All—how was earth to know,  
'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro?

## XII

Dearest, three months ago  
When we loved each other so,  
Lived and loved the same 80  
Till an evening came  
When a shaft from the devil's bow  
Pierced to our ingle-glow,  
And the friends were friend and foe!

72. Mrs. Browning believed in mesmerism and spiritualism; Browning became more and more sceptical of all such manifestations.

## XIII

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Not from the heart beneath—           | 85 |
| 'T was a bubble born of breath,       |    |
| Neither sneer nor vaunt,              |    |
| Nor reproach nor taunt.               |    |
| See a word, how it severeth!          |    |
| Oh, power of life and death           | 90 |
| In the tongue, as the Preacher saith! |    |

## XIV

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Woman, and will you cast      |    |
| For a word, quite off at last |    |
| Me, your own, your You,—      |    |
| Since, as truth is true,      | 95 |
| I was You all the happy past— |    |
| Me do you leave aghast        |    |
| With the memories We amassed? |    |

## XV

|                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Love, if you knew the light           |     |
| That your soul casts in my sight,     | 100 |
| How I look to you                     |     |
| For the pure and true                 |     |
| And the beauteous and the right,—     |     |
| Bear with a moment's spite            |     |
| When a mere mote threatens the white! | 105 |

## XVI

|                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| What of a hasty word?                 |     |
| Is the fleshly heart not stirred      |     |
| By a worm's pin-prick                 |     |
| Where its roots are quick?            |     |
| See the eye, by a fly's foot blurred— | 110 |
| Ear, when a straw is heard            |     |
| Scratch the brain's coat of curd!     |     |

## XVII

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Foul be the world or fair     |     |
| More or less, how can I care? |     |
| 'T is the world the same      | 115 |
| For my praise or blame,       |     |

And endurance is easy there.  
Wrong in the one thing rare—  
Oh, it is hard to bear!

## XVIII

Here 's the spring back or close, 120  
When the almond-blossom blows:  
We shall have the word  
In a minor third  
There is none but the cuckoo knows:  
Heaps of the guelder-rose! 125  
I must bear with it, I suppose.

## XIX

Could but November come,  
Were the noisy birds struck dumb  
At the warning slash  
Of his driver's-lash— 130  
I would laugh like the valiant Thumb  
Facing the castle glum  
And the giant's fee-faw-fum!

## XX

Then, were the world well stripped  
Of the gear wherein equipped 135  
We can stand apart,  
Heart dispense with heart  
In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,—  
Oh, the world's hangings ripped,  
We were both in a bare-walled crypt! 140

## XXI

Each in the crypt would cry  
"But one freezes here! and why?  
When a heart, as chill,  
At my own would thrill  
Back to life, and its fires out-fly? 145  
Heart, shall we live or die?  
The rest, . . . settle by-and-by!"

## XXII

So she 'd efface the score,  
 And forgive me as before.  
     It is twelve o'clock: 150  
     I shall hear her knock  
 In the worst of a storm's uproar,  
     I shall pull her through the door,  
 I shall have her for evermore!

## EVELYN HOPE\*

## I

BEAUTIFUL Evelyn Hope is dead!  
     Sit and watch by her side an hour.  
 That is her book-shelf, this her bed;  
     She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,  
 Beginning to die too, in the glass; 5  
     Little has yet been changed, I think:  
 The shutters are shut, no light may pass  
     Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

## II

Sixteen years old when she died!  
     Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name; 10  
 It was not her time to love; beside,  
     Her life had many a hope and aim,  
 Duties enough and little cares,  
     And now was quiet, now astir,  
 Till God's hand beckoned unawares,— 15  
     And the sweet white brow is all of her.

---

\* Basing his hope on the belief that after death we pass through a series of lives and worlds "not a few," the middle-aged lover says his time will "come for taking" the sixteen-year-old Evelyn; though he is sitting by her dead body now, and she never did love him, "perhaps she had scarcely heard my name." God will see to it that each passion is requited, even if it takes several afterlives to reach that consummation. This is a remarkable example of optimism. In "One Word More," speaking not dramatically, but for himself, Browning refers to other *lives* (l. 115), and the same idea is mentioned in "Old Pictures in Florence." All three of these poems appeared in *Men and Women* (1855).

## III

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?

What, your soul was pure and true,  
The good stars met in your horoscope,

Made you of spirit, fire and dew—

20

And, just because I was thrice as old

And our paths in the world diverged so wide,  
Each was nought to each, must I be told?

We were fellow mortals, nought beside?

## IV

No, indeed! for God above

25

Is great to grant, as mighty to make,  
And creates the love to reward the love:

I claim you still, for my own love's sake!

Delayed it may be for more lives yet,

Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few:

30

Much is to learn, much to forget

Ere the time be come for taking you.

## V

But the time will come,—at last it will,

When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)  
In the lower earth, in the years long still,

35

That body and soul so pure and gay?

Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,

And your mouth of your own geranium's red—

And what you would do with me, in fine,

In the new life come in the old one's stead.

40

## VI

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,

Given up myself so many times,

Gained me the gains of various men,

Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;

Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,

45

Either I missed or itself missed me:

And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!

What is the issue? let us see!

## VII

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while.

My heart seemed full as it could hold? 50

There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,

And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.

So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep:

See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!

There, that is our secret: go to sleep! 55

You will wake, and remember, and understand.

## UP AT A VILLA—DOWN IN THE CITY\*

(AS DISTINGUISHED BY AN ITALIAN PERSON OF QUALITY)

## I

HAD I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,

The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square;

Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

## II

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at least!

There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast; 5

While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than a  
beast.

## III

Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a bull

Just on a mountain-edge as bare as the creature's skull,

Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!

—I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair's turned  
wool. 10

## IV

But the city, oh the city—the square with the houses! Why?

They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's something to take  
the eye!

---

\* This contrast of Italian life in town and country was published in *Men and Women* (1855), after the Brownings had lived in Italy for nine years. The poet shares the speaker's delight in town life, but not his contempt for the countryside, whose beauty the "person of quality" indicates unconsciously. In 1850 Mrs. Browning's description of their villa in the hills two miles above Siena mentions the beautiful view of the country "under the sun, alive with verdure and vineyards" (*Letters to her Sister*, p. 128).

10. *Own*: own skull.

Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry;  
 You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who hurries  
 by;  
 Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the sun  
 gets high; 15  
 And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted properly.

## V

What of a villa? Though winter be over in March by rights,  
 'T is May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well off  
 the heights:  
 You've the brown ploughed land before, where the oxen steam  
 and wheeze,  
 And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint grey olive-  
 trees. 20

## VI

Is it better in May, I ask yo ' You've summer all at once;  
 In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns.  
 'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three fingers  
 well,  
 The wild tulip, at the end of its tube, blows out its great red bell  
 Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick and  
 sell. 25

## VII

Is it ever hot in the square? There's a fountain to spout and  
 splash!  
 In the shade it sings and springs; in the shine such foam-bows  
 flash  
 On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and paddle  
 and pash  
 Round the lady atop in her conch—fifty gazers do not abash,  
 Though all that she wears is some weeds round her waist in  
 a sort of sash. 30

## VIII

All the year long at the villa, nothing to see though you linger,  
 Except yon cypress that points like death's lean lifted forefinger.  
 Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix i' the corn and  
 mingle,  
 Or thrid the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.



Late August or early September, the stunning cicada is shrill, 35  
 And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous firs  
 on the hill.

Enough of the seasons,—I spare you the months of the fever  
 and chill.

## IX

Ere you open your eyes in the city, the blessed church-bells  
 begin:

No sooner the bells leave off than the diligence rattles in:

You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a pin. 40  
 By-and-by there's the travelling doctor gives pills, lets blood,  
 draws teeth;

Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market beneath.

At the post-office such a scene-picture—the new play, piping hot!  
 And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal thieves were  
 shot.

Above it, behold the Archbishop's most fatherly of rebukes, 45  
 And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little new law of  
 the Duke's!

Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend Don So-and-so  
 Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Saint Jerome, and Cicero,  
 "And moreover," (the sonnet goes rhyming,) "the skirts of  
 Saint Paul has reached,

Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more unctuous than  
 ever he preached." 50

Noon strikes,—here sweeps the procession! our Lady borne  
 smiling and smart

With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven swords stuck  
 in her heart!

*Bang-whang-whang* goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife;  
 No keeping one's haunches still: it's the greatest pleasure in life.

39. *Diligence*: stage-coach.

42. *Pulcinello-trumpet*: trumpet announcing the puppet-show.

44. The word "thieves" indicates the aristocrat's contempt for the patriots who sought the liberation of Italy.

48-9. Praised as if equal to the greatest poets, humanists, saints, and scholars of Italy and ancient Rome, and almost equal to the most successful preacher Italy ever heard, St. Paul.

51-2. The Virgin as Our Lady of Sorrows (seven in number). The speaker is thinking only of the delightful spangles and pink gauze.

## X

But bless you, it's dear—it's dear! fowls, wine, at double the rate. 55

They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil pays passing the gate

It's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me, not the city! Beggars can scarcely be choosers: but still—ah, the pity, the pity! Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with cowls and sandals,

And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-holding the yellow candles; 60

One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross with handles

And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better prevention of scandals:

*Bang-whang-whang* goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife.

Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in life!

## A WOMAN'S LAST WORD\*

## I

LET 's contend no more, love,

Strive nor weep:

All be as before, Love,

—Only sleep!

56. The salt tax was still an important source of revenue in Italy, and the cost of provisions was further increased by the *octroi*, a local tariff levied on all produce that entered the city gates.

\* The speaker is a woman expressing her own intellectual and moral self-surrender. To her, it is better to keep her love, even though that means shutting her eyes to the truth, than to kill love by dwelling on imperfections in her lover. The imagery is from *Paradise Lost*, in which attention should be called to the line "He for God only, she for God in him" (IV, 299). Milton was the first great poet of the "Liberal," Non-Conformist tradition to which Browning belonged—less liberal in its conception of woman than the Renaissance or Chaucer. In a letter to Browning, February 16, 1846, Elizabeth Barrett expresses her contempt for those who sacrifice love to duty; to her, as to Keats, the "heart's affections" are "holy things." This poem was published after Browning had known Elizabeth for ten years (in *Men and Women*, 1855).

## II

What so wild as words are? 5  
I and thou  
In debate, as birds are,  
Hawk on bough!

## III

See the creature stalking  
While we speak! 10  
Hush and hide the talking,  
Cheek on cheek!

## IV

What so false as truth is,  
False to thee?  
Where the serpent's tooth is 15  
Shun the tree—

## V

Where the apple reddens  
Never pry—  
Lest we lose our Edens,  
Eve and I. 20

## VI

Be a god and hold me  
With a charm!  
Be a man and fold me  
With thine arm!

## VII

Teach me, only teach, Love! 25  
As I ought  
I will speak thy speech, Love,  
Think thy thought—

## VIII

Meet, if thou require it,  
Both demands, 30  
Laying flesh and spirit  
In thy hands.

## IX

That shall be to-morrow  
 Not to-night:  
 I must bury sorrow 35  
 Out of sight:

## X

—Must a little weep, Love,  
 (Foolish me!)  
 And so fall asleep, Love,  
 Loved by thee. 40

## FRA LIPPO LIPPI\*

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave!  
 You need not clap your torches to my face.  
 Zooks, what 's to blame? you think you see a monk!  
 What, 't is past midnight, and you go the rounds,  
 And here you catch me at an alley's end 5  
 Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?  
 The Carmine 's my cloister: hunt it up,  
 Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,  
 Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,  
 And nip each softling of a wee white mouse, 10  
*Weke, weke*, that 's crept to keep him company!  
 Aha, you know your betters! Then, you 'll take  
 Your hand away that 's fiddling on my throat,  
 And please to know me likewise. Who am I?

\* The speaker is "Brother" Filippo Lippi (c. 1406–1469), a Carmelite friar and painter, of the early Florentine Renaissance. Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*, which Browning followed very closely, says Fra Filippo liked cheerful people "and lived for his own part in a very joyous fashion." Browning's love of life, his sympathy with Italy, and his lifelong interest in art, make this poem at once a delightful expression of his own exuberant vitality and a dramatic re-creation of the spirit of the Renaissance. On February 23, 1853, Browning mentioned that he was writing "lyrics with more music and painting than before, so as to get people to hear and see. . . ." The poem itself is conceived as a painting—a night piece with lights, shadows, and groups, as painted by Rembrandt. It was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Fra Lippo Lippi had already figured in the *Imaginary Conversations* by Browning's friend Landor.

3. *Zooks*: "gadzooks" (an oath).

7. *Carmine*: monastery of the friars Del Carmine.

Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend 15  
 Three streets off—he's a certain . . . how d' ye call?  
 Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,  
 I' the house that caps the corner. Bohl you were best!  
 Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,  
 How you affected such a gullet's-gripe! 20  
 But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves  
 Pick up a manner nor discredit you:  
 Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets  
 And count fair prize what comes into their net?  
 He's Judas to a tittle, that man is! 25  
 Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.  
 Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go  
 Drink out this quarter-florin to the health  
 Of the munificent House that harbours me  
 (And many more beside, lads! more beside!) 30  
 And all's come square again. I'd like his face—  
 His, elbowing on his comrade in the door  
 With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds  
 John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair  
 With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say) 35  
 And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!  
 It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,  
 A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!  
 Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.  
 What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down, 40  
 You know them and they take you? like enough!  
 I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—  
 "Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.  
 Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.  
 Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands 45  
 To roam the town and sing out carnival,  
 And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,

17. *Cosimo of the Medici*: great Florentine banker and patron of art, the real ruler of Florence. Notice the effect on the guard.

18. *Bohl you were best*: i.e., "to have taken your hand off my throat"—as the next line shows. Browning gives us the information tail-first.

23. *Pilchards*: a kind of fish.

25. Browning is indicating the psychology of the artist who sees the pictorial possibilities even in this situation, and at the same time we are made aware of the group present in the background. (This is a typical dramatic monologue, not spoken alone like a soliloquy.)

A-painting for the great man, saints and saints  
 And saints again. I could not paint all night—  
 Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air. 50  
 There came a hurry of feet and little feet,  
 A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song,—  
*Flower o' the broom,*  
*Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!*  
*Flower o' the quince,* 55  
*I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?*  
*Flower o' the thyme*—and so on. Round they went.  
 Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter  
 Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three slim shapes,  
 And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood, 60  
 That 's all I 'm made of! Into shreds it went,  
 Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,  
 All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,  
 There was a ladder! Down I let myself,  
 Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped, 65  
 And after them. I came up with the fun  
 Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—  
*Flower o' the rose,*  
*If I 've been merry, what matter who knows?*  
 And so as I was stealing back again 70  
 To get to bed and have a bit of sleep  
 Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work  
 On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast  
 With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,  
 You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see! 75  
 Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—  
 Mine 's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting 's in that!  
 If Master Cosimo announced himself,  
 Mum 's the word naturally; but a monk!

53 ff. This is a *stornello*, a kind of Florentine folk-song.

61 ff. According to Vasari, it was said that Fra Lippo Lippi was "much addicted to the pleasures of sense," and to keep him from "running about" and neglecting his work, Cosimo shut him up in his palace. But after enduring this for two days, Lippi "made ropes with the sheets of his bed, which he cut to pieces for that purpose," and escaped through the window.

67. *Saint Laurence*: the Church of San Lorenzo.

73. St. Jerome was a Church Father (340-420 A.D.) who prepared the Vulgate translation of the Bible. This subject is humorously inappropriate for Lippi.

Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now! 80  
 I was a baby when my mother died  
 And father died and left me in the street.  
 I starved there, God knows how, a year or two  
 On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,  
 Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day, 85  
 My stomach being empty as your hat,  
 The wind doubled me up and down I went.  
 Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,  
 (Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)  
 And so along the wall, over the bridge, 90  
 By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,  
 While I stood munching my first bread that month:  
 "So, boy, you 're minded," quoth the good fat father  
 Wiping his own mouth, 't was refection-time,—  
 "To quit this very miserable world? 95  
 Will you renounce" . . . "the mouthful of bread?" thought I;  
 By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;  
 I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,  
 Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,  
 Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici 100  
 Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.  
 Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,  
 'T was not for nothing—the good bellyful,  
 The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,  
 And day-long blessed idleness beside! 105  
 "Let 's see what the urchin 's fit for"—that came next.  
 Not overmuch their way, I must confess.  
 Such a to-do! They tried me with their books:  
 Lord, they 'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!  
*Flower o' the clove,* 110  
*All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!*  
 But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets  
 Eight years together, as my fortune was,  
 Watching folk's faces to know who will fling  
 The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires, 115  
 And who will curse or kick him for his pains,—

88 ff. Vasari tells of this aunt who placed him in the Carmelite convent when she was unable to support him. There he proved to be "ingenious in all works performed by hand" and manifested "the utmost dullness and incapacity in letters."

Which gentleman processional and fine,  
 Holding a candle to the Sacrament  
 Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch  
 The droppings of the wax to sell again, 120  
 Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—  
 How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop  
 His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—  
 Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,  
 He learns the look of things, and none the less 125  
 For admonition from the hunger-pinch.  
 I had a store of such remarks, be sure,  
 Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.  
 I drew men's faces on my copy-books,  
 Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge, 130  
 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,  
 Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,  
 And made a string of pictures of the world  
 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,  
 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black. 135  
 "Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out, d' ye say?  
 In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.  
 What if at last we get our man of parts,  
 We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese  
 And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine 140  
 And put the front on it that ought to be!"  
 And hereupon he bade me daub away.  
 Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,  
 Never was such prompt disemburdening.  
 First, every sort of monk, the black and white, 145  
 I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,  
 From good old gossips waiting to confess  
 Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—  
 To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,  
 Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there 150  
 With the little children round him in a row

121. *The Eight*: the magistrates who governed Florence.

130. *Antiphonary*: choir-book. Cf. Vasari: "he never did anything but daub his own books . . . with caricatures, whereupon the prior determined to give him all means and every opportunity for learning to draw."

140. *Preaching Friars*: Dominicans.

148. *Cribs*: small thefts.

150. *Safe*: having fled to the church for sanctuary.



Of admiration, half for his beard and half  
 For that white anger of his victim's son  
 Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,  
 Signing himself with the other because of Christ 155  
 (Whose sad face on the cross sees only this  
 After the passion of a thousand years)  
 Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,  
 (Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve  
 On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf, 160  
 Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers  
 (The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.  
 I painted all, then cried "'T is ask and have;  
 Choose, for more 's ready!"—laid the ladder flat,  
 And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall. 165  
 The monks closed in a circle and praised loud  
 Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,  
 Being simple bodies,—“That 's the very man!  
 Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!  
 That woman 's like the Prior's niece who comes 170  
 To care about his asthma: it 's the life!”  
 But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funk'd;  
 Their betters took their turn to see and say:  
 The Prior and the learned pulled a face  
 And stopped all that in no time. “How? what 's here? 175  
 Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!  
 Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true  
 As much as pea and peal it 's devil's-game!  
 Your business is not to catch men with show,  
 With homage to the perishable clay, 180  
 But lift them over it, ignore it all,  
 Make them forget there 's such a thing as flesh.  
 Your business is to paint the souls of men—  
 Man's soul, and it 's a fire, smoke . . . no, it 's not . . .  
 It 's vapour done up like a new-born babe— 185  
 (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)  
 It 's . . . well, what matters talking, it 's the soul!  
 Give us no more of body than shows soul!  
 Here 's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,  
 That sets us praising,—why not stop with him? 190  
 Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head  
 With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?

Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!  
 Rub all out, try at it a second time.  
 Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts, 195  
 She 's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—  
 Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!  
 Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?  
 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body  
 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further 200  
 And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white  
 When what you put for yellow 's simply black,  
 And any sort of meaning looks intense  
 When all beside itself means and looks nought.  
 Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn, 205  
 Left foot and right foot, go a double step,  
 Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,  
 Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,  
 The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty  
 You can't discover if it means hope, fear, 210  
 Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?  
 Suppose I 've made her eyes all right and blue,  
 Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,  
 And then add soul and heighten them threefold?  
 Or say there 's beauty with no soul at all— 215  
 (I never saw it—put the case the same—)  
 If you get simple beauty and nought else,  
 You get about the best thing God invents:  
 That 's somewhat: and you 'll find the soul you have missed,  
 Within yourself, when you return him thanks. 220  
 "Rub all out!" Well, well, there 's my life, in short,  
 And so the thing has gone on ever since.  
 I 'm grown a man no doubt, I 've broken bounds:  
 You should not take a fellow eight years old  
 And make him swear to never kiss the girls. 225

207. In this plea for realism in art, portraying both body and soul, Browning not only catches the spirit of the Renaissance revolt against Medieval asceticism, but also defends his own poetic practice. Neither Browning nor the Renaissance swings to the extreme of eliminating "soul" entirely, though they conceived of the soul differently. Lippi is very close in spirit to the Florentine artist Benvenuto Cellini, whose *Autobiography* (begun in 1558) should be compared with this dramatic monologue (autobiographic in method), published while Browning was living in Florence three centuries later.

I 'm my own master, paint now as I please—  
 Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!  
 Lord, it 's fast holding by the rings in front—  
 Those great rings serve more purposes than just  
 To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse! 230  
 And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes  
 Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,  
 The heads shake still—"It 's art's decline, my son!  
 You 're not of the true painters, great and old;  
 Brother Angelico 's the man, you 'll find; 235  
 Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:  
 Fag on at flesh, you 'll never make the third!"  
*Flower o' the pine,*  
*You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I 'll stick to mine!*  
 I 'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know! 240  
 Don't you think they 're the likeliest to know,  
 They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,  
 Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint  
 To please them—sometimes do and sometimes don't;  
 For, doing most, there 's pretty sure to come 245  
 A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—  
 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—  
*(Flower o' the peach,*  
*Death for us all, and his own life for each!)*  
 And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over, 250  
 The world and life 's too big to pass for a dream,  
 And I do these wild things in sheer despite,  
 And play the fooleries you catch me at,  
 In pure rage! The old mill-horse, out at grass  
 After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so, 255  
 Although the miller does not preach to him  
 The only good of grass is to make chaff.  
 What would men have? Do they like grass or no—  
 May they or mayn't they? all I want 's the thing  
 Settled for ever one way. As it is, 260  
 You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:

235. The Florentine painter Fra Angelico (1387-1455) represents the Medieval religious art that is so foreign to Lippi.

236. Lorenzo Monaco, a painter who had been Lippi's teacher, was a monk of the order of the Camaldolese.

249. Individualism is typical both of the Renaissance and of Browning.

You don't like what you only like too much,  
 You do like what, if given you at your word,  
 You find abundantly detestable.  
 For me, I think I speak as I was taught; 265  
 I always see the garden and God there  
 A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,  
 The value and significance of flesh,  
 I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards,

You understand me: I 'm a beast, I know. 270  
 But see, now—why, I see as certainly  
 As that the morning-star 's about to shine,  
 What will hap some day. We 've a youngster here  
 Comes to our convent, studies what I do,  
 Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop: 275  
 His name is Guidi—he 'll not mind the monks—  
 They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—  
 He picks my practice up—he 'll paint apace,  
 I hope so—though I never live so long,  
 I know what 's sure to follow. You be judge! 280  
 You speak no Latin more than I, belike;  
 However, you 're my man, you 've seen the world  
 —The beauty and the wonder and the power,  
 The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,  
 Changes, surprises,—and God made it all! 285  
 —For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,  
 For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,

262. Compare this psychology with the Freudian analysis of repressions and inhibitions.

268. Browning's belief in Progress makes it possible for him, without inconsistency, to say what he is saying through Fra Lippo here, and what he says in "Old Pictures in Florence." He considered Medieval art an advance over Greek art because of its greater concern with the "soul" (especially with the *irrational* elements in the "soul"). But modern art seemed to him another step in the same direction, since he believed that "flesh helps soul" ("Rabbi Ben Ezra," 72). Notice that he has in mind here a scene that suggests Milton, who had made the introduction of Eve an occasion for a moralistic attack on asceticism, and "Whatever hypocrites austere talk" (*Paradise Lost*, IV, 744). But Browning carries his objection to restraint much farther than Milton.

276-7. *Hulking Tom*: Tommaso Guidi, also called Masaccio (1401-1428). Browning seems to have been misled by Baldinucci's *Delle Notizie de' Professori del Disegno da Cimabue* into thinking that Masaccio was Lippi's pupil, when he was probably his teacher.

The mountain round it and the sky above,  
 Much more the figures of man, woman, child,  
 These are the frame to? What 's it all about? 290  
 To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,  
 Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.  
 But why not do as well as say,—paint these  
 Just as they are, careless what comes of it?  
 God's works—paint anyone, and count it crime 295  
 To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works  
 Are here already; nature is complete:  
 Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)  
 There 's no advantage! you must beat her, then."  
 For, don't you mark? we 're made so that we love 300  
 First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;  
 And so they are better, painted—better to us,  
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;  
 God uses us to help each other so, 305  
 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,  
 Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,  
 And trust me but you should, though! How much more,  
 If I drew higher things with the same truth!  
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place, 310  
 Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,  
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do  
 And we in our graves! This world 's no blot for us,  
 Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:  
 To find its meaning is my meat and drink. 315  
 "Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"  
 Strikes in the Prior: "when your meaning 's plain  
 It does not say to folk—remember matins,  
 Or, mind you fast next Friday!" Why, for this  
 What need of art at all? A skull and bones, 320  
 Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what 's best,  
 A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.  
 I painted a Saint Laurence six months since  
 At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style:

307. *Cullion*: base fellow.

323-4. *A Saint Laurence . . . At Prato*: near Florence. St. Laurence, a martyr, being broiled to death on a gridiron, told his torturers to turn him over as he was "done on one side."

"How looks my painting, now the scaffold 's down?" 325  
 I ask a brother: "Hugely," he returns—  
 "Already not one phiz of your three slaves  
 Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,  
 But 's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,  
 The pious people have so eased their own 330  
 With coming to say prayers there in a rage:  
 We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.  
 Expect another job this time next year,  
 For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—  
 Your painting serves its purpose!" Hang the fools! 335

—That is—you 'll not mistake an idle word  
 Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,  
 Tasting the air this spicy night which turns  
 The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!  
 Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now! 340  
 It 's natural a poor monk out of bounds  
 Should have his apt word to excuse himself:  
 And hearken how I plot to make amends.  
 I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece  
 . . . There 's for you! Give me six months, then go, see 345  
 Something in Sant' Ambrogio's! Bless the nuns!  
 They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint  
 God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,  
 Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood,  
 Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet 350  
 As puff on puff of grated orris-root  
 When ladies crowd to Church at midsummer.  
 And then i' the front, of course a saint or two—  
 Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,  
 Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white 355  
 The convent's friends and gives them a long day,  
 And Job, I must have him there past mistake,  
 The man of Uz (and Us without the z,  
 Painters who need his patience). Well, all these  
 Secured at their devotion, up shall come 360  
 Out of a corner when you least expect,

346. *Sant' Ambrogio's*: a convent in Florence where Lippi painted  
*The Coronation of the Virgin* described in the remainder of this poem.  
 Browning saw this painting in Florence.

As one by a dark stair into a great light,  
 Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—  
 Mazed, motionless and moonstruck—I 'm the man!  
 Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear? 365  
 I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,  
 My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,  
 I, in this presence, this pure company!  
 Where 's a hole, where 's a corner for escape?  
 Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing 370  
 Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so fast!"  
 —Addresses the celestial presence, "nay—  
 He made you and devised you, after all,  
 Though he 's none of you! Could Saint John there draw—  
 His camel-hair make up a painting-brush? 375  
 We come to brother Lippo for all that,  
*Iste perfecit opus!*" So, all smile—  
 I shuffle sideways with my blushing face  
 Under the cover of a hundred wings  
 Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you 're gay 380  
 And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,  
 Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops  
 The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off  
 To some safe bench behind, not letting go  
 The palm of her, the little lily thing 385  
 That spoke the good word for me in the nick,  
 Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.  
 And so all 's saved for me, and for the church  
 A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!  
 Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights! 390  
 The street 's hushed, and I know my own way back,  
 Don't fear me! there 's the grey beginning. Zooks!

374-5. Cf. Mark i, 6: "And John was clothed with camel's hair."

377. *Iste perfecit opus*: "This man executed the work." These words appear in the painting near Lippi, who is in the lower right hand corner of his own painting.

381. *Hot cockles*: a game.

## A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S\*

## I

OH Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find!  
 I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and  
 blind;  
 But although I take your meaning, 't is with such a heavy mind!

## II

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the good it  
 brings.  
 What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were  
 the kings,  
 Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with  
 rings?

## III

Ay, because the sea's the street there; and 't is arched by . . .  
 what you call  
 . . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept the  
 carnival:

I was never out of England—it's as if I saw it all.

\* Arthur Symons says, "In this poem Browning has called up before us the whole aspect of Venetian life in the eighteenth century" (*Introduction to the Study of Browning*, p. 115). It was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Baldassare Galuppi (1706–85) was a Venetian composer, said to have written 54 light operas as well as church music and sonatas. The music Browning rented for his piano in Italy (and probably the things he played on the convent organ that Milton had played in Vallambrosa) included music by Galuppi. In this poem the music evokes the frivolous, gay Venice of the period of Italian decadence, when the impulse of the Renaissance had spent itself and the national awakening of the *Risorgimento* had not yet begun. The verse itself charms the ear with music of subtle beauty, creating just the appropriate mood of delicate, sensuous pleasure under which is a strong, persistent sadness. Contrast Byron's treatment of the same Venice in *Beppo*. See A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London, 1939), IV, 280 ff.

*Toccata*: a "touch-piece," an overture illustrating technique, light and free in movement.

6. *St. Mark's*: the cathedral at Venice. The Doge was the chief magistrate of Venice; every year he threw a ring into the sea to symbolize the union of Venice and the Adriatic.

8. *Shylock's bridge*: the Rialto, over the Grand Canal. (Shylock of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.)

9. Browning had been out of England several times, and by the time the poem was published had lived in Italy nine years. The speaker is an imaginary person.



## IV

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was warm  
 in May? 10  
 Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-day,  
 When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you  
 say?

## V

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,—  
 On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed,  
 O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his  
 head? 15

## VI

Well, and it was graceful of them—they'd break talk off and  
 afford  
 —She, to bite her mask's black velvet—he, to finger on his  
 sword,  
 While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord?

## VII

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh  
 on sigh,  
 Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions—  
 "Must we die?" 20  
 Those commiserating sevenths—"Life might last! we can but  
 try!"

## VIII

"Were you happy?"—"Yes."—"And are you still as happy?"  
 —"Yes. And you?"  
 —"Then, more kisses!"—"Did *I* stop them, when a million  
 seemed so few?"  
 Hark, the dominant's persistence till it must be answered to!

18. *Clavichord*: ancestor of the piano.

19. The "lesser thirds" show the key to be minor; the "diminished sixth" used as a "suspension" (see next line) gives a dismal effect.

20. *Suspension*: note held over from one chord to another; *solution*: concord following a dissonance such as those produced by a "suspension" or the "commiserating sevenths."

21. *Seventh*: probably a minor seventh—not so mournful as the "lesser thirds" and "diminished sixths"; of all dissonances none is so pleasing to the ear.

24. The dominant chord is the chord written on the dominant, the fifth tone of the scale.

## IX

So, an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you, I dare  
say!<sup>25</sup>  
"Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave and gay!  
I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!"

## X

Then they left you for their pleasure: till in due time, one by  
one,  
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well  
undone,  
Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see the  
sun.<sup>30</sup>

## XI

But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand nor  
swerve,  
While I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close reserve,  
In you come with your cold music till I creep thro' every nerve.

## XII

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was  
burned:  
"Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice  
earned."<sup>35</sup>  
The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be discerned.

## XIII

"Yours for instance: you know physics, something of geology,  
Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their degree;  
Butterflies may dread extinction,—you'll not die, it cannot be!

---

25. The dominant is answered in the tonic, an octave above the first presentation of the theme. Although with the "commiserating sevenths" life seemed possible, in a kind of pleasing melancholy, the inevitable solution, resistless fate, must come at last.

32. The speaker is evidently a scientist. Browning may be taking a sly dig at the high spiritual evaluation his own contemporaries placed on scientific knowledge.

36-38. The existence of a soul might depend on geological information and a dilettante pleasure in mathematics. Browning did not believe that a sinner had a soul destined for damnation. That the soul exists only insofar as it is moving towards God is a conception very close to Neo-Platonism.

## XIV

"As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and  
 drop, 40  
 Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were  
 the crop:  
 What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?"

## XV

"Dust and ashes!" So you creak it, and I want the heart to  
 scold.  
 Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what's become of all the  
 gold  
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown  
 old. 45

## BY THE FIRE-SIDE\*

## I

How well I know what I mean to do  
 When the long dark autumn-evenings come:  
 And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue?  
 With the music of all thy voices, dumb  
 In life's November too! 5

## II

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,  
 O'er a great wise book as beseemeth age,  
 While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows  
 And I turn the page, and I turn the page,  
 Not verse now, only prose! 10

## III

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,  
 "There he is at it, deep in Greek:  
 Now then, or never, out we slip  
 To cut from the hazels by the creek  
 A mainmast for our ship!" 15

\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855), this poem reflects Browning's own experience and his anticipation of having his wife by his side throughout the autumn of life. The scene is laid in a mountain gorge near the Baths of Lucca, where they had spent the summer in 1849 and 1853. Browning was to outlive his wife by twenty-five years.

## IV

I shall be at it indeed, my friends:  
Greek puts already on either side  
Such a branch-work forth as soon extends  
To a vista opening far and wide,  
And I pass out where it ends. 20

## V

The outside-frame, like your hazel-trees:  
But the inside-archway widens fast,  
And a rarer sort succeeds to these,  
And we slope to Italy at last  
And youth, by green degrees. 25

## VI

I follow wherever I am led,  
Knowing so well the leader's hand:  
Oh woman-country, wooed not wed,  
Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,  
Laid to their hearts instead! 30

## VII

Look at the ruined chapel again  
Half-way up in the Alpine gorge!  
Is that a tower, I point you plain,  
Or is it a mill, or an iron-forge  
Breaks solitude in vain? 35

## VIII

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;  
The woods are round us, heaped and dim;  
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,  
The thread of water single and slim,  
Through the ravage some torrent brings! 40

19. Notice Browning's great interest in Greek; he translated from Euripides in *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871) and *Aristophanes' Apology* (1875), partly in memory of his wife's fondness for "Euripides, the Human, with his droppings of warm tears," as she had called him.

24-25. In old age he expects to look back down the past towards their youth in Italy. Actually, Mrs. Browning was forty years old before their life in Italy began.

## IX

Does it feed the little lake below?  
 That speck of white just on its marge  
 Is Pella; see, in the evening-glow,  
 How sharp the silver spear-heads charge  
 When Alp meets heaven in snow! 45

## X

On our other side is the straight-up rock;  
 And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it  
 By boulder-stones where lichens mock  
 The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit  
 Their teeth to the polished block. 50

## XI

Oh the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,  
 And thorny balls, each three in one,  
 The chestnuts throw on our path in showers!  
 For the drop of the woodland fruit 's begun,  
 These early November hours, 55

## XII

That crimson the creeper's leaf across  
 Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,  
 O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss,  
 And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped  
 Elf-needed mat of moss, 60

## XIII

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged  
 Last evening—nay, in to-day's first dew  
 Yon sudden coral nipple bulged  
 Where a freaked fawn-coloured flaky crew  
 Of toadstools peep indulged. 65

## XIV

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge  
 That takes the turn to a range beyond,  
 Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge  
 Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond  
 Danced over by the midge. 70

---

43. *Pella*: a village.

## XV

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,  
Blackish-grey and mostly wet;  
Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.  
See here again, how the lichens fret  
And the roots of the ivy strike! 75

## XVI

Poor little place, where its one priest comes  
On a festa-day, if he comes at all,  
To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,  
Gathered within that precinct small  
By the dozen ways one roams— 80

## XVII

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,  
Or climb from the hemp-dressers' low shed,  
Leave the grange where the woodman stores his nuts,  
Or the wattled cote where the fowlers spread  
Their gear on the rock's bare juts. 85

## XVIII

It has some pretension too, this front,  
With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise  
Set over the porch, Art's early wont:  
'T is John in the Desert, I surmise,  
But has borne the weather's brunt— 90

## XIX

Not from the fault of the builder, though,  
For a pent-house properly projects  
Where three carved beams make a certain show,  
Dating—good thought of our architect's—  
'Five, six, nine, he lets you know. 95

## XX

And all day long a bird sings there,  
And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times;  
The place is silent and aware;  
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,  
But that is its own affair. 100

## XXI

My perfect wife, my Leonor,  
 Oh heart, my own, oh eyes, mine too,  
 Whom else could I dare look backward for,  
 With whom beside should I dare pursue  
 The path grey heads abhor? 105

## XXII

For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them;  
 Youth, flowery all the way, there stops—  
 Not they; age threatens and they contemn,  
 Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,  
 One inch from life's safe hem! 110

## XXIII

With me, youth led . . . I will speak now,  
 No longer watch you as you sit  
 Reading by fire-light, that great brow  
 And the spirit-small hand propping it,  
 Mutely, my heart knows how— 115

## XXIV

When, if I think but deep enough,  
 You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme;  
 And you, too, find without rebuff  
 Response your soul seeks many a time  
 Piercing its fine flesh-stuff. 120

## XXV

My own, confirm me! If I tread  
 This path back, is it not in pride  
 To think how little I dreamed it led  
 To an age so blest that, by its side,  
 Youth seems the waste instead? 125

## XXVI

My own, see where the years conduct!  
 At first, 't was something our two souls

101. *Leonor*: the devoted wife in Beethoven's opera of married love, *Fidelio*.

113-114. This is a description of his wife.

Should mix as mists do; each is sucked  
In each now: on, the new stream rolls,  
Whatever rocks obstruct. 130

## XXVII

Think, when our one soul understands  
The great Word which makes all things new,  
When earth breaks up and heaven expands,  
How will the change strike me and you  
In the house not made with hands? 135

## XXVIII

Oh I must feel your brain prompt mine,  
Your heart anticipate my heart,  
You must be just before, in fine,  
See and make me see, for your part,  
New depths of the divine! 140

## XXIX

But who could have expected this  
When we two drew together first  
Just for the obvious human bliss,  
To satisfy life's daily thirst  
With a thing men seldom miss? 145

## XXX

Come back with me to the first of all,  
Let us lean and love it over again,  
Let us now forget and now recall,  
Break the rosary in a pearly rain,  
And gather what we let fall! 150

## XXXI

What did I say?—that a small bird sings  
All day long, save when a brown pair  
Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings  
Strained to a bell: 'gainst noon-day glare  
You count the streaks and rings. 155



## XXXII

But at afternoon or almost eve  
 'T is better; then the silence grows  
 To that degree, you half believe  
 It must get rid of what it knows,  
 Its bosom does so heave. 160

## XXXIII

Hither we walked then, side by side,  
 Arm in arm and cheek to cheek,  
 And still I questioned or replied,  
 While my heart, convulsed to really speak,  
 Lay choking in its pride. 165

## XXXIV

Silent the crumbling bridge we cross,  
 And pity and praise the chapel sweet,  
 And care about the fresco's loss,  
 And wish for our souls a like retreat,  
 And wonder at the moss. 170

## XXXV

Stoop and kneel on the settle under,  
 Look through the window's grated square:  
 Nothing to see! For fear of plunder,  
 The cross is down and the altar bare,  
 As if thieves don't fear thunder. 175

## XXXVI

We stoop and look in through the grate,  
 See the little porch and rustic door,  
 Read duly the dead builder's date;  
 Then cross the bridge that we crossed before,  
 Take the path again—but wait! 180

## XXXVII

Oh moment, one and infinite!  
 The water slips o'er stock and stone;  
 The West is tender, hardly bright:  
 How grey at once is the evening grown—  
 One star, its chrysolite! 185

## XXXVIII

We two stood there with never a third,  
But each by each, as each knew well:  
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,  
The lights and the shades made up a spell  
Till the trouble grew and stirred. 190

## XXXIX

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!  
And the little less, and what worlds away!  
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,  
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,  
And life be a proof of this! 195

## XL

Had she willed it, still had stood the screen  
So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her:  
I could fix her face with a guard between,  
And find her soul as when friends confer,  
Friends—lovers that might have been. 200

## XLI

For my heart had a touch of the woodland-time,  
Wanting to sleep now over its best.  
Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,  
But bring to the last leaf no such test!  
"Hold the last fast!" runs the rhyme. 205

## XLII

For a chance to make your little much,  
To gain a lover and lose a friend,  
Venture the tree and a myriad such,  
When nothing you mar but the year can mend:  
But a last leaf—fear to touch! 210

## XLIII

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall  
Eddying down till it find your face  
At some slight wind—best chance of all!  
Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place  
You trembled to forestall! 215

## XLIV

Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,  
That hair so dark and dear, how worth  
That a man should strive and agonize,  
And taste a veriest hell on earth  
For the hope of such a prize! 220

## XLV

You might have turned and tried a man,  
Set him a space to weary and wear,  
And prove which suited more your plan,  
His best of hope or his worst despair,  
Yet end as he began. 225

## XLVI

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,  
And filled my empty heart at a word.  
If two lives join, there is oft a scar,  
They are one and one, with a shadowy third;  
One near one is too far. 230

## XLVII

A moment after, and hands unseen  
Were hanging the night around us fast;  
But we knew that a bar was broken between  
Life and life: we were mixed at last  
In spite of the mortal screen. 235

## XLVIII

The forests had done it; there they stood;  
We caught for a moment the powers at play:  
They had mingled us so, for once and good,  
Their work was done—we might go or stay,  
They relapsed to their ancient mood. 240

## XLIX

How the world is made for each of us!  
How all we perceive and know in it  
Tends to some moment's product thus,  
When a soul declares itself—to wit,  
By its fruit, the thing it does! 245

## L

Be hate that fruit or love that fruit,  
It forwards the general deed of man,  
And each of the Many helps to recruit  
The life of the race by a general plan;  
Each living his own, to boot. 250

## LI

I am named and known by that moment's feat;  
There took my station and degree;  
So grew my own small life complete,  
As nature obtained her best of me—  
One born to love you, sweet! 255

## LII

And to watch you sink by the fire-side now  
Back again, as you mutely sit  
Musing by fire-light, that great brow  
And the spirit-small hand propping it,  
Yonder, my heart knows how! 260

## LIII

So, earth has gained by one man the more,  
And the gain of earth must be heaven's gain too;  
And the whole is well worth thinking o'er  
When autumn comes: which I mean to do  
One day, as I said before. 265

## ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND\*

## I

My love, this is the bitterest, that thou—  
Who art all truth, and who dost love me now  
As thine eyes say, as thy voice breaks to say—

\* The speaker is a dying woman telling her husband that he will become interested in other women after she is gone. She hates to think how it will lower his dignity to fall so; she herself would be quite capable of remaining faithful. This poem proved to be prophetic of Browning's own conduct. Six years after its publication (in *Men and Women*, 1855) Browning's wife died, and ten years later he proposed marriage to Lady Louisa Ashburton, telling her, however, that his "heart was buried in Florence." Browning was rejected, and never forgave himself his faithlessness.

Shouldst love so truly, and couldst love me still  
 A whole long life through, had but love its will, 5  
 Would death that leads me from thee brook delay.

## II

I have but to be by thee, and thy hand  
 Will never let mine go, nor heart withstand  
 The beating of my heart to reach its place.  
 When shall I look for thee and feel thee gone? 10  
 When cry for the old comfort and find none?  
 Never, I know! Thy soul is in thy face.

## III

Oh, I should fade—'t is willed so! Might I save,  
 Gladly I would, whatever beauty gave  
 Joy to thy sense, for that was precious too. 15  
 It is not to be granted. But the soul  
 Whence the love comes, all ravage leaves that whole;  
 Vainly the flesh fades; soul makes all things new.

## IV

It would not be because my eye grew dim  
 Thou couldst not find the love there, thanks to Him 20  
 Who never is dishonoured in the spark  
 He gave us from his fire of fires, and bade  
 Remember whence it sprang, nor be afraid  
 While that burns on, though all the rest grow dark.

## V

So, how thou wouldst be perfect, white and clean 25  
 Outside as inside, soul and soul's demesne  
 Alike, this body given to show it by!  
 Oh, three-parts through the worst of life's abyss,  
 What plaudits from the next world after this,  
 Couldst thou repeat a stroke and gain the sky! 30

## VI

And is it not the bitterer to think  
 That, disengage our hands and thou wilt sink  
 Although thy love was love in very deed?  
 I know that nature! Pass a festive day,  
 Thou dost not throw its relic-flower away 35  
 Nor bid its music's loitering echo speed.

VII

Thou let'st the stranger's glove lie where it fell;  
 If old things remain old things all is well,  
 For thou art grateful as becomes man best:  
 And hadst thou only heard me play one tune, 40  
 Or viewed me from a window, not so soon  
 With thee would such things fade as with the rest.

VIII

I seem to see! We meet and part; 't is brief;  
 The book I opened keeps a folded leaf,  
 The very chair I sat on, breaks the rank; 45  
 That is a portrait of me on the wall—  
 Three lines, my face comes at so slight a call:  
 And for all this, one little hour to thank!

IX

But now, because the hour through years was fixed,  
 Because our inmost beings met and mixed, 50  
 Because thou once hast loved me—wilt thou dare  
 Say to thy soul and Who may list beside,  
 "Therefore she is immortally my bride;  
 Chance cannot change my love, nor time impair.

X

"So, what if in the dusk of life that's left, 55  
 I, a tired traveller of my sun bereft,  
 Look from my path when, mimicking the same,  
 The fire-fly glimpses past me, come and gone?  
 —Where was it till the sunset? where anon  
 It will be at the sunrise! What's to blame?" 60

XI

Is it so helpful to thee? Canst thou take  
 The mimic up, nor, for the true thing's sake,  
 Put gently by such efforts at a beam?  
 Is the remainder of the way so long,  
 Thou need'st the little solace, thou the strong? 65  
 Watch out thy watch, let weak ones doze and dream!

## XII

—Ah, but the fresher faces! “Is it true,”  
 Thou ’lt ask, “some eyes are beautiful and new?  
 Some hair,—how can one choose but grasp such wealth?  
 And if a man would press his lips to lips 70  
 Fresh as the wilding hedge-rose-cup there slips  
 The dew-drop out of, must it be by stealth?”

## XIII

“It cannot change the love still kept for Her,  
 More than if such a picture I prefer  
 Passing a day with, to a room’s bare side: 75  
 The painted form takes nothing she possessed,  
 Yet, while the Titian’s Venus lies at rest,  
 A man looks. Once more, what is there to chide?”

## XIV

So must I see, from where I sit and watch,  
 My own self sell myself, my hand attach 80  
 Its warrant to the very thefts from me—  
 Thy singleness of soul that made me proud,  
 Thy purity of heart I loved aloud,  
 Thy man’s-truth I was bold to bid God see!

## XV

Love so, then, if thou wilt! Give all thou canst 85  
 Away to the new faces—disentranced,  
 (Say it and think it) obdurate no more:  
 Re-issue looks and words from the old mint,  
 Pass them afresh, no matter whose the print  
 Image and superscription once they bore! 90

## XVI

Re-coin thyself and give it them to spend,—  
 It all comes to the same thing at the end,  
 Since mine thou wast, mine art and mine shalt be,  
 Faithful or faithless, sealing up the sum  
 Or lavish of my treasure, thou must come 95  
 Back to the heart’s place here I keep for thee!

XVII

Only, why should it be with stain at all?  
 Why must I, 'twixt the leaves of coronal,  
 Put any kiss of pardon on thy brow?  
 Why need the other women know so much,  
 And talk together, "Such the look and such  
 The smile he used to love with, then as now!"

XVIII

Might I die last and show thee! Should I find  
 Such hardship in the few years left behind,  
 If free to take and light my lamp, and go  
 Into thy tomb, and shut the door and sit,  
 Seeing thy face on those four sides of it  
 The better that they are so blank, I know!

XIX

Why, time was what I wanted, to turn o'er  
 Within my mind each look, get more and more  
 By heart each word, too much to learn at first;  
 And join thee all the fitter for the pause  
 'Neath the low doorway's lintel. That were cause  
 For lingering, though thou calledst, if I durst!

XX

And yet thou art the nobler of us two:  
 What dare I dream of, that thou canst not do,  
 Outstripping my ten small steps with one stride?  
 I'll say then, here's a trial and a task—  
 Is it to bear?—if easy, I'll not ask:  
 Though love fail, I can trust on in thy pride.

XXI

Pride?—when those eyes forestall the life behind  
 The death I have to go through!—when I find,  
 Now that I want thy help most, all of thee!  
 What did I fear? Thy love shall hold me fast  
 Until the little minute's sleep is past  
 And I wake saved.—And yet it will not be!



AN EPISTLE  
CONTAINING THE  
STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF KARSHISH,  
THE ARAB PHYSICIAN\*

KARSHISH, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,  
The not-incurious in God's handiwork  
(This man's-flesh he hath admirably made,  
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,  
To coop up and keep down on earth a space 5  
That puff of vapour from his mouth, man's soul)  
—To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,  
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,  
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks 10  
Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,  
Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip  
Back and rejoin its source before the term,—  
And aptest in contrivance (under God)  
To baffle it by deftly stopping such:—  
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home 15  
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with peace)  
Three samples of true snakestone—rarer still,  
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,  
(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)  
And writeth now the twenty-second time. 20

My journeyings were brought to Jericho:  
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art  
Shall count a little labour unpaid?  
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone  
On many a flinty furlong of this land. 25  
Also, the country-side is all on fire

\* This poem, which appeared in *Men and Women* (1855), deals with the raising of Lazarus from the dead (see John xi, 1-46) and his subsequent attitude, as told by Karshish, a physician. Browning indicates the speaker's profession by his medical interests, technical language, the terms and figures of speech with which he thinks, and his open-minded approach to the problem.

7. *Abib*: the master of Karshish (and, like him, fictitious).

17. *Snakestone*: stone used to cure snake-bite.

21. *Jericho*: the last letter of Karshish was from this city, northeast of Jerusalem.

With rumours of a marching hitherward:  
 Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.  
 A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;  
 Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls: 30  
 I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.  
 Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,  
 And once a town declared me for a spy;  
 But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,  
 Since this poor covert where I pass the night, 35  
 This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence  
 A man with plague-sores at the third degree  
 Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here!  
 'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,  
 To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip 40  
 And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.  
 A viscid choler is observable  
 In tertians, I was nearly bold to say;  
 And falling-sickness hath a happier cure  
 Than our school wots of: there 's a spider here 45  
 Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,  
 Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back;  
 Take five and drop them . . . but who knows his mind,  
 The Syrian runagate I trust this to?  
 His service payeth me a sublimate 50  
 Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.  
 Best wait: I reach Jerusalem at morn,  
 There set in order my experiences,  
 Gather what most deserves, and give thee all—  
 Or I might add, Judæa's gum-tragacanth 55  
 Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,  
 Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,  
 In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease  
 Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—  
 Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar— 60  
 But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

28. *Vespasian*: Roman emperor who invaded Palestine in 66 A.D. His son Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

43. *Tertians*: fevers returning every third day.

44. *Falling-sickness*: epilepsy.

45-8. He starts to give a recipe for the use of these spiders as medicine.

55. *Gum-tragacanth*: a medicinal gum.

60. *Zoar*: city near the Dead Sea.

Yet stay: my Syrian blinketh gratefully,  
 Protesteth his devotion is my price—  
 Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal?  
 I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush, 65  
 What set me off a-writing first of all.  
 An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!  
 For, be it this town's barrenness—or else  
 The Man had something in the look of him—  
 His case has struck me far more than 't is worth. 70  
 So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose  
 In the great press of novelty at hand  
 The care and pains this somehow stole from me)  
 I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,  
 Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the truth? 75  
 The very man is gone from me but now,  
 Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.  
 Thus then, and let thy better wit help all!

'T is but a case of mania—subinduced  
 By epilepsy, at the turning-point 80  
 Of trance prolonged unduly some three days:  
 When, by the exhibition of some drug  
 Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art  
 Unknown to me which 't were well to know,  
 The evil thing out-breaking all at once 85  
 Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,—  
 But, flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide,  
 Making a clear house of it too suddenly,  
 The first conceit that entered might inscribe  
 Whatever it was minded on the wall 90  
 So plainly at that vantage, as it were,  
 (First come, first served) that nothing subsequent  
 Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls  
 The just-returned and new-established soul  
 Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart 95  
 That henceforth she will read or these or none.  
 And first—the man's own firm conviction rests  
 That he was dead (in fact they buried him)  
 —That he was dead and then restored to life  
 By a Nazarene physician of his tribe: 100

69. *The Man*: Lazarus, in whose "case" the physician is interested.

—'Sayeth, the same bade "Rise," and he did rise.  
"Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.  
Not so this figment!—not, that such a fume,  
Instead of giving way to time and health,  
Should eat itself into the life of life, 105  
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all  
For see, how he takes up the after-life.  
The man—it is one Lazarus a Jew,  
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,  
The body's habit wholly laudable, 110  
As much, indeed, beyond the common health  
As he were made and put aside to show.  
Think, could we penetrate by any drug  
And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,  
And bring it clear and fair, by three days' sleep! 115  
Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?  
This grown man eyes the world now like a child.  
Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,  
Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,  
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke, 120  
Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the case,—  
He listened not except I spoke to him,  
But folded his two hands and let them talk,  
Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no fool.  
And that 's a sample how his years must go. 125  
Look, if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,  
Should find a treasure,—can he use the same  
With straitened habits and with tastes starved small,  
And take at once to his impoverished brain  
The sudden element that changes things, 130  
That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand  
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?  
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth—  
Warily parsimonious, when no need,  
Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times? 135  
All prudent counsel as to what befits  
The golden mean, is lost on such an one:  
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.  
So here—we call the treasure knowledge, say,  
Increased beyond the fleshly faculty— 140  
Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,  
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven:

The man is witless of the size, the sum,  
 The value in proportion of all things,  
 Or whether it be little or be much. 145  
 Discourse to him of prodigious armaments  
 Assembled to besiege his city now,  
 And of the passing of a mule with gourds—  
 'T is one! Then take it on the other side,  
 Speak of some trifling fact,—he will gaze rapt 150  
 With stupor at its very littleness,  
 (Far as I see) as if in that indeed  
 He caught prodigious import, whole results;  
 And so will turn to us the bystanders  
 In ever the same stupor (note this point) 155  
 That we too see not with his opened eyes.  
 Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,  
 Preposterously, at cross purposes.  
 Should his child sicken unto death,—why, look  
 For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness, 160  
 Or pretermission of the daily craft!  
 While a word, gesture, glance from that same child  
 At play or in the school or laid asleep,  
 Will startle him to an agony of fear,  
 Exasperation, just as like. Demand 165  
 The reason why—" 't is but a word," object—  
 "A gesture"—he regards thee as our lord  
 Who lived there in the pyramid alone,  
 Looked at us (dost thou mind?) when, being young,  
 We both would unadvisedly recite 170

145 ff. In "Browning's Idealism" (*Transactions, Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters*, XVII, 1), J. W. Cunliffe explains that in Browning's thought good and evil, space and time, are human conceptions, having no place in the Eternal Mind. "But this absolute truth must not be used by man as a basis of action in this life, in which he lives not by the absolute but by the relative . . . to realize this in human life is fatal to the soul—it reduces man to a state of apathy, like that of Lazarus after his resurrection (*Karshish*), or it ruins him by obliterating the distinction between right and wrong . . . a necessary means to human progress" (pp. 677-8). This conception, so very close to the relativity of certain twentieth-century philosophies, should be contrasted with Christian and Classical ethics, both of which insist that men should bend every effort to make absolute truth the basis of action in this life, and that from any genuine mystic experience comes not apathy but greater energy. The difference is partly that this conception of God is more Oriental than Christian.

Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,  
 Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst  
 All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.  
 Thou and the child have each a veil alike  
 Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both 175  
 Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match  
 Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know!  
 He holds on firmly to some thread of life—  
 (It is the life to lead perforcedly)  
 Which runs across some vast distracting orb 180  
 Of glory on either side that meagre thread,  
 Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—  
 The spiritual life around the earthly life:  
 The law of that is known to him as this,  
 His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here. 185  
 So is the man perplexed with impulses  
 Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,  
 Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,  
 And not along, this black thread through the blaze—  
 "It should be" balked by "here it cannot be." 190  
 And oft the man's soul springs into his face  
 As if he saw again and heard again  
 His sage that bade him "Rise" and he did rise.  
 Something, a word, a tick o' the blood within  
 Admonishes: then back he sinks at once 195  
 To ashes, who was very fire before,  
 In sedulous recurrence to his trade  
 Whereby he earneth him the daily bread;  
 And studiously the humbler for that pride,  
 Professedly the faultier that he knows 200  
 God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.  
 Indeed the especial marking of the man  
 Is prone submission to the heavenly will—  
 Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.

202-4 and 211-12. Contrast this fatalism and lack of morality with the Platonic interpretation of the results of escaping from the ordinary world of relative values, e.g., in Plato's "Myth of the Cave" (*Republic*, bk. VII) and in the whole Gospel of John, from which the story of Lazarus is drawn.

204. Lazarus, having experienced eternal life, is not subject to doubt and hence he can not think or talk on the plane of earthly humanity. Browning considers doubt a spiritual advantage, and any mystical contact of a man with Absolute Reality a disaster.

'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last 205  
 For that same death which must restore his being  
 To equilibrium, body loosening soul  
 Divorced even now by premature full growth:  
 He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live  
 So long as God please, and just how God please. 210  
 He even seeketh not to please God more  
 (Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.  
 Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach  
 The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,  
 Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do: 215  
 How can he give his neighbour the real ground,  
 His own conviction? Ardent as he is—  
 Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old  
 "Be it as God please" reassureth him.  
 I probed the sore as thy disciple should: 220  
 "How, beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness  
 Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march  
 To stamp out like a little spark thy town,  
 Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?"  
 He merely looked with his large eyes on me. 225  
 The man is apathetic, you deduce?  
 Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,  
 Able and weak, affects the very brutes  
 And birds—how say I? flowers of the field—  
 As a wise workman recognizes tools 230  
 In a master's workshop, loving what they make.  
 Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:  
 Only impatient, let him do his best,  
 At ignorance and carelessness and sin—  
 An indignation which is promptly curbed: 235  
 As when in certain travel I have feigned  
 To be an ignoramus in our art  
 According to some preconceived design,  
 And hopped to hear the land's practitioners,  
 Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance, 240  
 Prattle fantastically on disease,  
 Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace!

Thou wilt object—Why have I not ere this  
 Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene

Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source, 245  
 Conferring with the frankness that befits?  
 Alas! it grieveth me, the learned leech  
 Perished in a tumult many years ago,  
 Accused,—our learning's fate,—of wizardry,  
 Rebellion, to the setting up a rule 250  
 And creed prodigious as described to me.  
 His death, which happened when the earthquake fell  
 (Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss  
 To occult learning in our lord the sage  
 Who lived there in the pyramid alone) 255  
 Was wrought by the mad people—that 's their wont!  
 On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,  
 To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—  
 How could he stop the earthquake? That 's their way!  
 The other imputations must be lies: 260  
 But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,  
 In mere respect for any good man's fame.  
 (And after all, our patient Lazarus  
 Is stark mad; should we count on what he says?  
 Perhaps not: though in writing to a leech 265  
 'T is well to keep back nothing of a case.)  
 This man so cured regards the curer, then,  
 As—God forgive me! who but God himself,  
 Creator and sustainer of the world,  
 That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile! 270  
 —'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,  
 Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,  
 Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,  
 And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,  
 And must have so avouched himself, in fact, 275  
 In hearing of this very Lazarus  
 Who saith—but why all this of what he saith?  
 Why write of trivial matters, things of price  
 Calling at every moment for remark?  
 I noticed on the margin of a pool 280

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252-5. The earthquake, recorded by Matthew (xxvii, 51) as happening when Christ died, was taken by Karshish and Abib as a sign of the impending death of some "lord and sage" whom they follow. Notice Browning's skill in creating the psychological atmosphere of the civilizations near the Arabian Desert in the first century A.D.



Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,  
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,  
Which, now that I review it, needs must seem  
Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth! 285  
Nor I myself discern in what is writ  
Good cause for the peculiar interest  
And awe indeed this man has touched me with.  
Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness  
Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus: 290  
I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills  
Like an old lion's cheek teeth. Out there came  
A moon made like a face with certain spots  
Multiform, manifold and menacing:  
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met 295  
In this old sleepy town at unaware,  
The man and I. I send thee what is writ.  
Regard it as a chance, a matter risked  
To this ambiguous Syrian—he may lose,  
Or steal, or give it thee with equal good. 300  
Jerusalem's repose shall make amends  
For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine;  
Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell!

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?  
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too— 305  
So, through the thunder comes a human voice  
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!  
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!

305 ff. Karshish is struck by the Christian emphasis on Love as characteristic of God. If the revelation that Lazarus believes in is really true, then God is All-Loving as well as All-Powerful. According to Browning, man has little power but much love, and this could give humanity a direct contact with a God of Love. This is the quintessence of Browning's interpretation of religion, and it should be contrasted with those religions which turn to God from a strong sense of the wickedness of men. He said, "The evidence of divine power is everywhere about us; not so the evidence of divine love. That love could only reveal itself to the human heart by some supreme act of *human* tenderness and devotion; the fact, or fancy, of Christ's cross and passion could alone supply such a revelation" (quoted by Mrs. Orr, *Contemporary Review*, December, 1891). He parodies the opposite conception of God in "Caliban upon Setebos."

Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,  
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,  
And thou must love me who have died for thee!"  
The madman saith He said so: it is strange.

310

## A SERENADE AT THE VILLA\*

## I

THAT was I, you heard last night,  
When there rose no moon at all,  
Nor, to pierce the strained and tight  
Tent of heaven, a planet small:  
Life was dead and so was light.

5

## II

Not a twinkle from the fly,  
Not a glimmer from the worm;  
When the crickets stopped their cry,  
When the owls forbore a term,  
You heard music; that was I.

10

## III

Earth turned in her sleep with pain,  
Sultrily suspired for proof:  
In at heaven and out again,  
Lightning!—where it broke the roof,  
Bloodlike, some few drops of rain.

15

## IV

What they could my words expressed,  
O my love, my all, my one!  
Singing helped the verses best,  
And when singing's best was done,  
To my lute I left the rest.

20

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\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). The unlucky lover has just spent a sultry night serenading his lady, but her windows stayed dark and fast. Something makes him suspect that his music has merely made the oppressive night more oppressive to her. Cf. "The Last Ride Together" and "One Way of Love."

## V

So wore night; the East was gray,  
White the broad-faced hemlock-flowers:  
There would be another day;  
Ere its first of heavy hours  
Found me, I had passed away. 25

## VI

What became of all the hopes,  
Words and song and lute as well?  
Say, this struck you—"When life gropes  
Feebly for the path where fell  
Light last on the evening slopes, 30

## VII

"One friend in that path shall be,  
To secure my step from wrong;  
One to count night day for me,  
Patient through the watches long,  
Serving most with none to see." 35

## VIII

Never say—as something bodes—  
"So, the worst has yet a worse!  
When life halts 'neath double loads,  
Better the taskmaster's curse  
Than such music on the roads! 40

## IX

"When no moon succeeds the sun,  
Nor can pierce the midnight's tent  
Any star, the smallest one,  
While some drops, where lightning rent,  
Show the final storm begun— 45

## X

"When the fire-fly hides its spot,  
When the garden-voices fail  
In the darkness thick and hot,—  
Shall another voice avail,  
That shape be where these are not? 50

## XI

"Has some plague a longer lease,  
 Proffering its help uncouth?  
 Can't one even die in peace?  
 As one shuts one's eyes on youth,  
 Is that face the last one sees?" 55

## XII

Oh how dark your villa was,  
 Windows fast and obdurate!  
 How the garden grudged me grass  
 Where I stood—the iron gate  
 Ground its teeth to let me pass! 60

## MY STAR\*

ALL that I know  
 Of a certain star  
 Is, it can throw  
 (Like the angled spar)  
 Now a dart of red, 5  
 Now a dart of blue;  
 Till my friends have said  
 They would fain see, too,  
 My star that dartles the red and the blue!  
 Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled: 10  
 They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.  
 What matter to me if their star is a world?  
 Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

## A PRETTY WOMAN\*\*

## I

THAT fawn-skin-dappled hair of hers,  
 And the blue eye  
 Dear and dewy,  
 And that infantine fresh air of hers!

\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). When asked for his autograph, it was Browning's custom to write out this poem. It is usually considered to be written to his wife.

4. *Angled spar*: Iceland spar, a prism which breaks the light into its colors.

\*\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). The model for this poem may have been Gerardine Bate, niece of Mrs. Jameson. The two ladies vis-



## VII

So, we leave the sweet face fondly there: 25  
    Be its beauty  
    Its sole duty!  
Let all hope of grace beyond, lie there!

## VIII

And while the face lies quiet there,  
    Who shall wonder 30  
    That I ponder  
A conclusion? I will try it there.

## IX

As,—why must one, for the love forgone,  
    Scout mere liking?  
    Thunder-striking 35  
Earth,—the heaven, we looked above for, gone!

## X

Why, with beauty, needs there money be,  
    Love with liking?  
    Crush the fly-king  
In his gauze, because no honey-bee? 40

## XI

May not liking be so simple-sweet,  
    If love grew there  
    'T would undo there  
All that breaks the cheek to dimples sweet?

## XII

Is the creature too imperfect, say? 45  
    Would you mend it  
    And so end it?  
Since not all addition perfects aye!

## XIII

Or is it of its kind, perhaps,  
    Just perfection— 50  
    Whence, rejection  
Of a grace not to its mind, perhaps?

## XIV

Shall we burn up, tread that face at once  
 Into tinder,  
 And so hinder  
 Sparks from kindling all the place at once? 55

## XV

Or else kiss away one's soul on her?  
 Your love-fancies!  
 —A sick man sees  
 Truer, when his hot eyes roll on her! 60

## XVI

Thus the craftsman thinks to grace the rose,—  
 Plucks a mould-flower  
 For his gold flower,  
 Uses fine things that efface the rose:

## XVII

Rosy rubies make its cup more rose,  
 Precious metals  
 Ape the petals,—  
 Last, some old king locks it up, morose! 65

## XVIII

Then how grace a rose! I know a way!  
 Leave it, rather.  
 Must you gather?  
 Smell, kiss, wear it—at last, throw away! 70

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK  
 TOWER CAME"\*

(See Edgar's song in "LEAR")

## I

My first thought was, he lied in every word,  
 That hoary cripple, with malicious eye  
 Askance to watch the working of his lie  
 On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford  
 Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored 5  
 Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

\* On January 1, 1852, Browning made a New Year's resolution to write a poem every day. That day he wrote "Women and Roses" and on January

II

What else should he be set for, with his staff?

What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare

All travellers who might find him posted there,

3, "Love Among the Ruins" (note the diversity); between these, on January 2, "Childe Roland." It was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Like Edgar's song in *King Lear* (III, iv) which suggested this train of images, the poem grows out of the Medieval literature of ballads and fairy tales, knights, quests, castles, miracles, and Arthurian romance. (*Childe* means "Lord," and *Roland* is the same as "Orlando.") But this poem lacks the Medieval simplicity and clarity. Its indefinite suggestiveness is utterly different from allegory with clear-cut representation of definite abstractions. The attempts to work it out as an allegory have only served to show the hopelessness of such "interpretation" and the essential futility of that kind of Browning study. (Those who like to work puzzles should compare the interpretations in Phelps, *Browning*; Nettleship, *Essays and Thoughts*; Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopaedia*; Cooke, *Guide-Book*.) Browning himself when asked if he agreed with an allegorical analysis of *Childe Roland*, said, "Oh, no, not at all. Understand, I don't repudiate it, either; I only mean I was conscious of no allegorical intention" (Whiting, *The Brownings*, Boston, 1911, p. 261). When the Reverend J. W. Chadwick asked Browning if the central purpose of the poem could be expressed as "He that endureth to the end shall be saved," the poet said, "Yes, just about that."

This poem, partly because of its obscurity, is very modern. (Compare T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* and Wilder's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" in *The Angel that Troubled the Waters*.) Perhaps it should be called the first surrealist masterpiece in literature. Browning said it came upon him "as a kind of dream. I had to write it. . . . I did not know then what I meant beyond that, and I'm sure I don't know now" (Whiting, *loc. cit.*). But its irrationality is more than a surface creation; it springs from Browning's deepest feelings, for he anticipates the twentieth century in a certain anti-intellectualism. Now though today anti-intellectualism usually takes the form of attack on Christianity, in the nineteenth century it usually posed as a defense of Christianity; hence it is not surprising that often interpreters took this poem as an attack on "Atheistic Science" (e.g., Berdoe). Browning's later poetry on metaphysical and theological problems might indicate that these interpreters were in accord with him, even if he was not consciously expressing the idea in this poem. DeVane astutely points out that "The Lost Leader," "Prospice," "How they Brought the Good News," and many other poems by Browning resemble "Childe Roland pushing resolutely and courageously toward an unknown goal."

Edgar's song in *Lear*, III, iv. Edgar, disguised as a madman, speaks wildly, letting his fancy call up images and moods that have influenced Browning in this poem. (See Elliot, "Shakespeare's Significance for Browning," *Anglia*, Jan.-April, 1909, pp. 90-162.) Then he says:

"Childe Rowland to the dark tower came,

His word was still,—Fie, foh, and fum

I smell the blood of a British man."

Browning had just been reading Shakespeare for his essay on Shelley.



And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh 10  
 Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph  
 For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

## III

If at his counsel I should turn aside  
 Into that ominous tract which, all agree,  
 Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly 15  
 I did turn as he pointed: neither pride  
 Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,  
 So much as gladness that some end might be.

## IV

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,  
 What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope 20  
 Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope  
 With that obstreperous joy success would bring,—  
 I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring  
 My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

## V

As when a sick man very near to death  
 Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end  
 The tears, and takes the farewell of each friend,  
 And hears one bid the other go, draw breath  
 Freelier outside, ("since all is o'er," he saith,  
 "And the blow fallen no grieving can amend;") 30

## VI

While some discuss if near the other graves  
 Be room enough for this, and when a day  
 Suits best for carrying the corpse away,

12. Mrs. Orr, pointing out the "discrepancies" under the surface of the poem, calls attention to the fact that this "sinister-looking man" did "really put him on the right track." Phelps makes, but does not endorse, the suggestion that the Tower might be not the quest at all, but "damnation" and that the knight may be turning aside from the true road.

14 ff. Browning seems to have drawn many of his ideas to to what is horrible in landscape, and some other details (such as the old cripple), from his childhood reading of Lairese, *The Art of Painting in All its Branches*. See DeVane, "The Landscape of Browning's Childe Roland," *PMLA*, XL (1925), 426-32.

With care about the banners, scarves and staves:  
And still the man hears all, and only craves 35  
He may not shame such tender love and stay.

VII

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,  
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ  
So many times among "The Band"—to wit,  
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed 40  
Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,  
And all the doubt was now—should I be fit?

VIII

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,  
That hateful cripple, out of his highway  
Into the path he pointed. All the day 45  
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim  
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim  
Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

IX

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found  
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two, 50  
Than, pausing to throw backward a last view  
O'er the safe road, 't was gone; grey plain all round:  
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.  
I might go on; naught else remained to do.

X

So, on I went. I think I never saw 55  
Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:  
For flowers—as well expect a cedar grove!  
But cockle, spurge, according to their law  
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,  
You 'd think: a burr had been a treasure trove. 60

XI

No! penury, inertness and grimace,  
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. "See  
Or shut your eyes," said Nature peevishly,

"It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:  
 'T is the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place, 65  
 Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

## XII

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk  
 Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents  
 Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents  
 In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk 70  
 All hope of greenness? 't is a brute must walk  
 Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

## XIII

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair  
 In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud  
 Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood. 75  
 One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,  
 Stood stupefied, however he came there:  
 Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

## XIV

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,  
 With that red gaunt and coloped neck a-strain, 80  
 And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;  
 Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;  
 I never saw a brute I hated so;  
 He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

## XV

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart. 85  
 As a man calls for wine before he fights,  
 I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,  
 Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.  
 Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art:  
 One taste of the old time sets all to rights. 90

66. *Calcine*: turn to powder by heat.

68. *Bents*: coarse grasses.

76 ff. The horse was suggested to Browning by a figure of a red horse in a tapestry in his own drawing-room.

80. *Coloped*: ridged.

XVI

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face  
 Beneath its garniture of curly gold,  
 Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold  
 An arm in mine to fix me to the place,  
 That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!  
 Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold. 95

XVII

Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands  
 Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.  
 What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.  
 Good—but the scene shifts—faugh! what hangman hands 100  
 Pin to his breast a parchment? His own bands  
 Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

XVIII

Better this present than a past like that;  
 Back therefore to my darkening path again!  
 No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain. 105  
 Will the night send a howlet or a bat?  
 I asked: when something on the dismal flat  
 Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

XIX

A sudden little river crossed my path  
 As unexpected as a serpent comes. 110  
 No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;  
 This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath  
 For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath  
 Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

XX

So petty yet so spiteful! All along, 115  
 Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;  
 Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit  
 Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:  
 The river which had done them all the wrong,  
 Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit. 120

---

114. *Bespate*: bespattered.

## XXI

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared  
 To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,  
 Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek  
 For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!  
 —It may have been a water-rat I speared, 125  
 But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

## XXII

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.  
 Now for a better country. Vain presage!  
 Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,  
 Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank 130  
 Soil to a plash? Toads in a poisoned tank,  
 Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

## XXIII

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.  
 What penned them there, with all the plain to choose?  
 No foot-print leading to that horrid mews, 135  
 None out of it. Mad brewage set to work  
 Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk  
 Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

## XXIV

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there!  
 What bad use was that engine for, that wheel, 140  
 Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel  
 Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air  
 Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,  
 Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

## XXV

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood, 145  
 Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth  
 Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,  
 Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood  
 Changes and off he goes!) within a rood—  
 Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth. 150

XXVI

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,  
 Now patches where some leanness of the soil's  
 Broke into moss or substances like boils;  
 Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him  
 Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim 155  
 Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII

And just as far as ever from the end!  
 Nought in the distance but the evening, nought  
 To point my footstep further! At the thought,  
 A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend, 160  
 Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned  
 That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,  
 'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place  
 All round to mountains—with such name to grace 165  
 Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.  
 How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you!  
 How to get from them was no clearer case.

XXIX

Ye half I seemed to recognize some trick  
 Of mischief happened to me, God knows when— 170  
 In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,  
 Progress this way. When, in the very nick  
 Of giving up, one time more, came a click  
 As when a trap shuts—you 're inside the den!

XXX

Burningly it came on me all at once, 175  
 This was the place! those two hills on the right,  
 Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;

160. *Apollyon*: the Devil. Cf. Revelation, ix, 11.

161. *Penned*: pinioned.

While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,  
 Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,  
 After a life spent training for the sight! 180

## XXXI

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?  
 The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,  
 Built of brown stone, without a counterpart  
 In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf  
 Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf 185  
 He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

## XXXII

Not see? because of night perhaps?—why, day  
 Came back again for that! before it left,  
 The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:  
 The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay, 190  
 Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—  
 "Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!"

## XXXIII

Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled  
 Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears  
 Of all the lost adventurers my peers,— 195  
 How such a one was strong, and such was bold,  
 And such was fortunate, yet each of old  
 Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

## XXXIV

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met  
 To view the last of me, a living frame 200  
 For one more picture! in a sheet of flame  
 I saw them and I knew them all. And yet  
 Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,  
 And blew. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*"

181. Browning said that a tower he had seen in the Carrara mountains was in his mind when he wrote the poem.

203. *Slug-horn*: trumpet (Browning's meaning is erroneous; *slughorn* is really the same word as *slogan*). Commentators do not even agree as to whether he blew his horn in triumph or as a warning to others that he had failed in the quest.

## RESPECTABILITY\*

## I

DEAR, had the world in its caprice  
 Deigned to proclaim "I know you both,  
 Have recognized your plighted troth,  
 Am sponsor for you: live in peace!"—  
 How many precious months and years 5  
 Of youth had passed, that speed so fast,  
 Before we found it out at last,  
 The world, and what it fears?

## II

How much of priceless life were spent  
 With men that every virtue decks, 10  
 And women models of their sex,  
 Society's true ornament,—  
 Ere we dared wander, nights like this,  
 Thro' wind and rain, and watch the Seine,  
 And feel the Boulevart break again 15  
 To warmth and light and bliss?

## III

I know! the world proscribes not love;  
 Allows my finger to caress  
 Your lips' contour and downiness,  
 Provided it supply a glove. 20  
 The world's good word!—the Institute!  
 Guizot receives Montalembert!  
 Eh? Down the court three lampions flare:  
 Put forward your best foot!

---

\*The scene is Paris, 1852, at night. It is possible that as examples of unconventional lovers who had defied respectability, Browning had in mind George Sand (Madame Dudevant) and Jules Sandeau, since the Brownings had called on George Sand several times in Paris in 1852. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855).

15. *Boulevart*: Boulevard. The peculiarly French spelling emphasizes what the word suggests of Paris at night.

22. The allusions in this line carry the whole force of the contrast in the poem. Guizot, a constitutional royalist, and Montalembert, a Catholic Liberal, were bitter political enemies; but when Montalembert was elected to the Académie Française, a branch of the Institut de France, February 5, 1852, Guizot had to welcome him—to preserve appearances of respectability.

23. *Lampions*: lamps (in the lighted court of the Institute). The next line is ironic.



# A LIGHT WOMAN

## A LIGHT WOMAN\*

## I

So far as our story approaches the end,  
Which do you pity the most of us three?—  
My friend, or the mistress of my friend  
With her wanton eyes, or me?

## II

My friend was already too good to lose, 5  
And seemed in the way of improvement yet,  
When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose  
And over him drew her net.

## III

When I saw him tangled in her toils,  
A shame, said I, if she adds just him 10  
To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,  
The hundredth for a whim!

## IV

And before my friend be wholly hers,  
How easy to prove to him, I said,  
An eagle 's the game her pride prefers, 15  
Though she snaps at a wren instead!

## V

So, I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,  
My hand sought hers as in earnest need,  
And round she turned for my noble sake,  
And gave me herself indeed. 20

\* The man says that to save an infatuated friend he won the heart of the "light woman" (Victorian euphemism for "courtesan"), and now that he has her in the palm of his hand he does not know what to do with her. His friend considers him a thief, and how does he look to himself? It is awkward to meddle, and hard enough to save one's own soul. Beneath the drama others see, lies the man's own reason for what he has done. But what, psychologically, lies beneath his reasoning? Lafcadio Hearn's interpretation is that "When he says that he did not care for the woman, he only means that he is now tired of her. He has indulged his lust and his vanity by the most treacherous and brutal conduct; yet he tries to tell the world that he is a moral man, a martyr, a calumniated person. Such is the real meaning of his apology" (*Appreciations of Poetry*, p. 180). This poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855).

## VI

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world,  
The wren is he, with his maiden face.  
—You look away and your lip is curled?  
Patience, a moment's space!

## VII

For see—my friend goes shaking and white; 25  
He eyes me as the basilisk:  
I have turned, it appears, his day to night,  
Eclipsing his sun's disk.

## VIII

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief:  
"Though I love her—that, he comprehends— 30  
One should master one's passions, (love, in chief)  
And be loyal to one's friends!"

## IX

And she,—she lies in my hand as tame  
As a pear late basking over a wall;  
Just a touch to try and off it came; 35  
'T is mine,—can I let it fall?

## X

With no mind to eat it, that 's the worst!  
Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist?  
'T was quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst  
When I gave its stalk a twist. 40

## XI

And I,—what I seem to my friend, you see:  
What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess:  
What I seem to myself, do you ask of me?  
No hero, I confess.

## XII

'T is an awkward thing to play with souls, 45  
And matter enough to save one's own:  
Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals  
He played with for bits of stone!

## XIII

One likes to show the truth for the truth;  
 That the woman was light is very true: 50  
 But suppose she says,—Never mind that youth!  
 What wrong have I done to you?

## XIV

Well, any how, here the story stays,  
 So far at least as I understand;  
 And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays, 55  
 Here 's a subject made to your hand!

## THE STATUE AND THE BUST\*

THERE 's a palace in Florence, the world knows well,  
 And a statue watches it from the square,  
 And this story of both do our townsmen tell.

Ages ago, a lady there,  
 At the farthest window facing the East 5  
 Asked, "Who rides by with the royal air?"

The bridesmaids' prattle around her ceased;  
 She leaned forth, one on either hand;  
 They saw how the blush of the bride increased—

They felt by its beats her heart expand— 10  
 As one at each ear and both in a breath  
 Whispered, "The Great-Duke Ferdinand."

55-6. Browning presents in a dramatic monologue a situation which he says is worthy of treatment in a play. This is significant of his abandonment of playwriting; he stopped writing for the stage before his marriage. In regular dramatic form he could not have revealed the streams of consciousness—or subconsciousness—he was interested in.

\* This is a story full of the color, cruelty, and beauty of the Renaissance in Florence. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). The rhyme-scheme (not the meter) is that of *terza rima*.

1. *Palace*: of the Riccardi, originally built by the Medici (later the Palazzo Antinori).

2. *Statue*: of Ferdinand di Medici (1549-1608), Grand Duke. The statue faces the eastern window of the Riccardi palace. There is an empty shrine under the window, but the bust of the lady is fictitious. The square is the Annunziata Piazza.

That self-same instant, underneath,  
 The Duke rode past in his idle way,  
 Empty and fine like a swordless sheath. 15

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,  
 Till he threw his head back—"Who is she?"  
 —"A bride the Riccardi brings home to-day."

Hair in heaps lay heavily  
 Over a pale brow spirit-pure— 20  
 Carved like the heart of the coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encloſure—  
 And vainly sought to diſſemble her eyes  
 Of the blackeſt black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise 25  
 Filled the fine empty ſheath of a man,—  
 The Duke grew ſtraightway brave and wiſe.

He looked at her, as a lover can;  
 She looked at him, as one who awakes:  
 The paſt was a ſleep, and her life began. 30

Now, love ſo ordered for both their ſakes,  
 A feaſt was held that ſelfſame night  
 In the pile which the mighty ſhadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,  
 But the palace overſhadows one, 35  
 Becauſe of a crime which may God requite!

To Florence and God the wrong was done,  
 Through the firſt republic's murder there  
 By Coſimo and his curſed ſon.)

22. *Encloſure*: mane.

33. *Pile*: Ferdinand's palace, ſcene of the feaſt.

34. *Via Larga*: a ſtreet, now the Via Cavour.

39. Coſimo di Medici deſtroyed the republican liberty of Florence in the early fifteenth century; hence the palace he built is ſpoken of ſymbolically as overſhadowing the city. Lorenzo di Medici, "the Magnificent," was Coſimo's grandſon.

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square) 40  
Turned in the midst of his multitude  
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

Face to face the lovers stood  
A single minute and no more,  
While the bridegroom bent as a man subdued— 45

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor—  
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,  
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word?  
If a word did pass, which I do not think, 50  
Only one out of the thousand heard.

That was the bridegroom. At day's brink  
He and his bride were alone at last  
In a bedchamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast, 55  
That the door she had passed was shut on her  
Till the final catafalk repassed.

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,  
Through a certain window facing the East,  
She could watch like a convent's chronicler. 60

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,  
And a feast might lead to so much beside,  
He, of many evils, chose the least.

"Freely I choose too," said the bride—  
"Your window and its world suffice," 65  
Replied the tongue, while the heart replied—

"If I spend the night with that devil twice,  
May his window serve as my loop of hell  
Whence a damned soul looks on paradise!

---

57. *Catafalk*: carriage for a coffin.

"I fly to the Duke who loves me well,  
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow  
Ere I count another ave-bell. 70

"'T is only the coat of a page to borrow,  
And tie my hair in a horse-boy's trim,  
And I save my soul—but not to-morrow"— 75

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)  
"My father tarries to bless my state:  
I must keep it one day more for him.

"Is one day more so long to wait?  
Moreover the Duke rides past, I know;  
We shall see each other, sure as fate." 80

She turned on her side and slept. Just so!  
So we resolve on a thing and sleep:  
So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, "Dear or cheap  
As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove  
To body or soul, I will drain it deep." 85

And on the morrow, bold with love,  
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,  
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove) 90

And smiled "'T was a very funeral,  
Your lady will think, this feast of ours,—  
A shame to efface, whate'er befall!

"What if we break from the Arno bowers,  
And try if Petraja, cool and green,  
Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers?" 95

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen  
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,  
Said, "Too much favour for me so mean!

---

94. *Arno*: river that flows through Florence.

95. *Petraja*: suburb of Florence.

"But, alas! my lady leaves the South;  
Each wind that comes from the Apennine  
Is a menace to her tender youth: 100

"Nor a way exists, the wise opine,  
If she quits her palace twice this year,  
To avert the flower of life's decline." 105

Quoth the Duke, "A sage and a kindly fear.  
Moreover Petraja is cold this spring:  
Be our feast to-night as usual here!"

And then to himself—"Which night shall bring  
Thy bride to her lover's embraces, fool— 110  
Or I am the fool, and thou art the king!

"Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool—  
For to-night the Envoy arrives from France  
Whose heart I unlock with thyself, my tool.

"I need thee still and might miss perchance. 115  
To-day is not wholly lost, beside,  
With its hope of my lady's countenance:

"For I ride—what should I do but ride?  
And passing her palace, if I list,  
May glance at its window—well betide!" 120

So said, so done: nor the lady missed  
One ray that broke from the ardent brow,  
Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,  
No morrow's sun should arise and set 125  
And leave them then as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,  
With still fresh cause to wait one day more  
Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love's brief morning wore,  
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,  
They found love not as it seemed before. 130

They thought it would work infallibly,  
But not in despite of heaven and earth:  
The rose would blow when the storm passed by. 135

Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth  
By store of fruits that supplant the rose:  
The world and its ways have a certain worth:

And to press a point while these oppose  
Were a simple policy; better wait: 140  
We lose no friends and we gain no foes.

Meantime, worse fates than a lover's fate,  
Who daily may ride and pass and look  
Where his lady watches behind the grate!

And she—she watched the square like a book 145  
Holding one picture and only one,  
Which daily to find she undertook:

When the picture was reached the book was done,  
And she turned from the picture at night to scheme  
Of tearing it out for herself next sun. 150

So weeks grew months, years; gleam by gleam  
The glory dropped from their youth and love,  
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream;

Which hovered as dreams do, still above:  
But who can take a dream for a truth? 155  
Oh, hide our eyes from the next remove!

One day as the lady saw her youth  
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked  
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked,— 160  
And wondered who the woman was,  
Hollow-eyed and haggard-checked,



Fronting her silent in the glass—  
 "Summon here," she suddenly said,  
 "Before the rest of my old self pass, 165

"Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,  
 Who fashions the clay no love will change,  
 And fixes a beauty never to fade.

"Let Robbia's craft so apt and strange  
 Arrest the remains of young and fair, 170  
 And rivet them while the seasons range.

"Make me a face on the window there,  
 Waiting as ever, mute the while,  
 My love to pass below in the square!

"And let me think that it may beguile 175  
 Dreary days which the dead must spend  
 Down in their darkness under the aisle,

"To say, 'What matters it at the end?  
 I did no more while my heart was warm  
 Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.' 180

"Where is the use of the lip's red charm,  
 The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,  
 And the blood that blues the inside arm—

"Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,  
 The earthly gift to an end divine? 185  
 A lady of clay is as good, I trow."

But long ere Robbia's cornice, fine,  
 With flowers and fruits which leaves enlace,  
 Was set where now is the empty shrine—

169. The Della Robbia family gave its name to Della Robbia ware.

184. The necessary quotation mark before "Unless" is omitted in the 1889 edition.

185. Cf. "Rabbi Ben Ezra" (72), "flesh helps soul"; but contrast the more orthodox Christian fight *against* "the World, the Flesh, and the Devil."

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| THE STATUE AND THE BUST  | 317 |
| (And, leaning out of a bright blue space,<br>As a ghost might lean from a chink of sky,<br>The passionate pale lady's face—            | 190 |
| Eyeing ever, with earnest eye<br>And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,<br>Some one who ever is passing by—)                 | 195 |
| The Duke had sighed like the simplest wretch<br>In Florence, "Youth—my dream escapes!<br>Will its record stay?" And he bade them fetch |     |
| Some subtle moulder of brazen shapes—<br>"Can the soul, the will, die out of a man<br>Ere his body find the grave that gapes?"         | 200 |
| "John of Douay shall effect my plan,<br>Set me on horseback here aloft,<br>Alive, as the crafty sculptor can,                          |     |
| "In the very square I have crossed so oft:<br>That men may admire, when future suns<br>Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,         | 205 |
| "While the mouth and the brow stay brave in bronze—<br>Admire and say, 'When he was alive<br>How he would take his pleasure once!'     | 210 |
| "And it shall go hard but I contrive<br>To listen the while, and laugh in my tomb<br>At idleness which aspires to strive."             |     |
| <hr/>  |     |
| So! While these wait the trump of doom,<br>How do their spirits pass, I wonder,<br>Nights and days in the narrow room?                 | 215 |

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202. *John of Douay*: Giovanni da Bologna (1524-1608), sculptor who made the equestrian statue that suggested the poem.

213. His own idleness, in its fruitless aspiration, he will laugh at.

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder  
 What a gift life was, ages ago,  
 Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Only they see not God, I know, 220  
 Nor all that chivalry of his,  
 The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss—  
 Since, the end of life being manifest,  
 He had burned his way thro' the world to this. 225

I hear you reproach, "But delay was best,  
 For their end was a crime."—Oh, a crime will do  
 As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,  
 Sufficient to vindicate itself 230  
 And prove its worth at a moment's view!

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf?  
 Where a button goes, 't were an epigram  
 To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

218. Contrast 1 John, ii, 15-16, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. . . . For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"; and John xii, 25, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

220-23. Infinite aspiration has been called the characteristic Western attitude that unites the Medieval saint and the modernist like Browning. Contrast the Classical desire for balance and restraint, an ideal for which Browning often showed his dislike, especially in poems dealing with the Renaissance.

227. Contrast the *critical* ethics advocated by Socrates in Plato's *Crito*: "your zeal is invaluable, if a right one; but if wrong, the greater the zeal the greater the danger." Medieval saints and the Renaissance itself were much closer to Socrates than to Browning in their faith and philosophy, whatever may be said of their spirit and practice.

234. *Stamp of the . . . Guelph*: genuine coin with the stamp of the ruler.

The true has no value beyond the sham: 235  
 As well the counter as coin, I submit,  
 When your table 's a hat, and your prize a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,  
 Venture as warily, use the same skill,  
 Do your best, whether winning or losing it, 240

If you choose to play!—is my principle.  
 Let a man contend to the uttermost  
 For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

The counter our lovers staked was lost  
 As surely as if it were lawful coin: 245  
 And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,  
 Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.  
 You of the virtue (we issue join)  
 How strive you? *De te, fabula*

235. Cf. *Pippa Passes*, 190: "All service ranks the same with God." In Browning's philosophy, Porphyria's lover was better than this lady's lover.

237. *Dram*: drink.

247. This interpretation of the parable of the virgins who were not ready for the Bridegroom's coming (Matthew, xxv, 1-13) would have been considered blasphemous by any generation before Browning. Christ did not mean that it is "the sin" to be unready to commit even adultery. Berdoo, an admirer of Browning's thought, parts company with him here: "if every governor of a city felt himself at liberty to steal another man's wife merely to complete and perfect the circle of his own delights, society would soon be thrown back into barbarism" (*Browning Cyclopaedia*, p. 519). But Professor William Lyon Phelps defends Browning's position, saying that from the point of view of a Christian, a man who holds up a train and kills two men is better than a man who intends to rob a train but backs out: "Who is the most virtuous. . . Which has the best chance to be with God? Manifestly the brave one, although he is a robber and a murderer . . . for that criminal's individual soul, he was better . . . because the crime tested his character and found him sound." (*Browning*, 1915, pp. 275-7). For Lafcadio Hearn's defence, see Bibliography.

250. *De te, fabula*: "Concerning you [is told] the fable," i.e., this moral should be taken to heart by each reader.

## LOVE IN A LIFE\*

## I

Room after room,  
 I hunt the house through  
 We inhabit together.  
 Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her—  
 Next time, herself!—not the trouble behind her 5  
 Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!  
 As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew:  
 Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

## II

Yet the day wears,  
 And door succeeds door; 10  
 I try the fresh fortune—  
 Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.  
 Still the same chance! she goes out as I enter.  
 Spend my whole day in the quest,—who cares?  
 But 't is twilight, you see,—with such suites to explore, 15  
 Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

## LIFE IN A LOVE\*\*

ESCAPE me?  
 Never—  
 Beloved!  
 While I am I, and you are you,  
     So long as the world contains us both, 5  
     Me the loving and you the loth,  
 While the one eludes, must the other pursue.  
 My life is a fault at last, I fear:  
     It seems too much like a fate, indeed!  
     Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed. 10  
 But what if I fail of my purpose here?  
 It is but to keep the nerves at strain,  
     To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,

\* This is a companion piece to "Life in a Love." They were published in *Men and Women* (1855).

\*\* The title refers to a life spent pursuing an elusive love. This poem and its companion, "Love in a Life," were published in *Men and Women* (1855).

And, baffled, get up and begin again,—  
 So the chace takes up one's life, that 's all. 15  
 While, look but once from your farthest bound  
 At me so deep in the dust and dark,  
 No sooner the old hope goes to ground  
 Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,  
 I shape me— 20  
 Ever  
 Removed!

## HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY\*

I ONLY knew one poet in my life:  
 And this, or something like it, was his way.

You saw go up and down Valladolid,  
 A man of mark, to know next time you saw.  
 His very serviceable suit of black 5  
 Was courtly once and conscientious still,  
 And many might have worn it, though none did:  
 The cloak, that somewhat shone and showed the threads,  
 Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.  
 He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane, 10  
 Scenting the world, looking it full in face,  
 An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.

\* The poet, a mysterious personage observing everything, is mistaken for a spy of the government, making reports to his king. Poets are rather "God's spies"—to use a phrase from *Lear*, Browning's favorite play, which he was reading about this time in preparing his essay on Shelley. The poem appeared in *Men and Women* (1855). Browning wrote to Ruskin, December 10, 1855, that Poetry "is all teaching . . . and people hate to be taught. . . . A poet's affair is with God,—to whom he is accountable, and of whom is his reward"; and in his essay on Shelley (1852) he speaks of "the whole poet's function of beholding with an understanding keenness the universe, nature and man, in their actual state of perfection in imperfection" and of "the subjective poet of modern classification" who "is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the one above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth. . . . Not what man sees, but what God sees,—the *Ideas* of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand,—it is toward these that he struggles." This autocratic conception of the Poet's relation to his fellow men Browning expresses appropriately by a scene laid in Spain.

3. *Valladolid*: Spanish town.

They turned up, now, the alley by the church,  
 That leads nowhither; now, they breathed themselves  
 On the main promenade just at the wrong time: 15  
 You'd come upon his scrutinizing hat,  
 Making a peaked shade blacker than itself  
 Against the single window spared some house  
 Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work,—  
 Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick 20  
 Trying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks  
 Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.  
 He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,  
 The man who slices lemons into drink,  
 The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys 25  
 That volunteer to help him turn its winch.  
 He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,  
 And fly-leaf ballads on the vender's string,  
 And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.  
 He took such cognizance of men and things, 30  
 If any beat a horse, you felt he saw;  
 If any cursed a woman, he took note;  
 Yet stared at nobody,—you stared at him,  
 And found, less to your pleasure than surprise,  
 He seemed to know you and expect as much. 35  
 So, next time that a neighbour's tongue was loosed,  
 It marked the shameful and notorious fact,  
 We had among us, not so much a spy,  
 As a recording chief-inquisitor,  
 The town's true master if the town but knew! 40  
 We merely kept a governor for form,  
 While this man walked about and took account  
 Of all thought, said and acted, then went home,  
 And wrote it fully to our Lord the King  
 Who has an itch to know things, he knows why, 45  
 And reads them in his bedroom of a night.  
 Oh, you might smile! there wanted not a touch,  
 A tang of . . . well, it was not wholly ease

28. *Fly-leaf*: printed on single sheets of paper.

40. This might be the Spanish equivalent of the more English, parliamentary figure of speech that concludes "A Defence of Poetry" by Shelley, whom Browning so much admired: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Browning's conceptions should be compared and contrasted with those of Shelley's essay.

As back into your mind the man's look came.  
 Stricken in years a little,—such a brow 50  
 His eyes had to live under!—clear as flint  
 On either side the formidable nose  
 Curved, cut and coloured like an eagle's claw.  
 Had he to do with A.'s surprising fate?  
 When altogether old B. disappeared 55  
 And young C. got his mistress,—was't our friend,  
 His letter to the King, that did it all?  
 What paid the bloodless man for so much pains?  
 Our Lord the King has favourites manifold,  
 And shifts his ministry some once a month; 60  
 Our city gets new governors at whiles,—  
 But never word or sign, that I could hear,  
 Notified to this man about the streets  
 The King's approval of those letters conned  
 The last thing duly at the dead of night. 65  
 Did the man love his office? Frowned our Lord,  
 Exhorting when none heard—"Beseech me not!  
 Too far above my people,—beneath me!  
 I set the watch,—how should the people know?  
 Forget them, keep me all the more in mind!" 70  
 Was sone such understanding 'twixt the two?

I found no truth in one report at least—  
 That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes  
 Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,  
 You found he ate his supper in a room 75  
 Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,  
 And twenty naked girls to change his plate!  
 Poor man, he lived another kind of life  
 In that new stuccoed third house by the bridge  
 Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise! 80  
 The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat  
 Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,  
 Playing a decent cribbage with his maid  
 (Jacynth, you're sure her name was) o'er the cheese  
 And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears, 85  
 Or treat of radishes in April. Nine,  
 Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed went he.  
 My father, like the man of sense he was,



Would point him out to me a dozen times;  
 " 'St—'St," he'd whisper, "the Corregidor!" 90  
 I had been used to think that personage  
 Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,  
 And feathers like a forest in his hat,  
 Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,  
 Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its turn, 95  
 And memorized the miracle in vogue!  
 He had a great observance from us boys;  
 We were in error; that was not the man.

I'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,  
 To have just looked, when this man came to die, 100  
 And seen who lined the clean gay garret-sides  
 And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,  
 With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.  
 Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,  
 Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and death, 105  
 Doing the King's work all the dim day long,  
 In his old coat and up to knees in mud,  
 Smoked like a herring, dining on a crust,—  
 And, now the day was won, relieved at once!  
 No further show or need for that old coat, 110  
 You are sure, for one thing! Bless us, all the while  
 How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I!  
 A second, and the angels alter that.  
 Well, I could never write a verse,—could you?  
 Let's to the Prado and make the most of time. 115

## THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER\*

### I

I SAID—Then, dearest, since 't is so,  
 Since now at length my fate I know,  
 Since nothing all my love avails,

90. *Corregidor*: the chief magistrate of the city.

115. *The Prado*: the promenade of the city.

\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). The rejected lover is taking one last ride with his beloved, and thinks that heaven might be just like this. Berdoo in *The Browning Cyclopaedia* gives an enthusiastic analysis of the ideas in this poem. Cf. Duckworth, *Browning*, ch. VII, "Time and Eternity."

Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,  
 Since this was written and needs must be— 5  
 My whole heart rises up to bless  
 Your name in pride and thankfulness!  
 Take back the hope you gave,—I claim  
 Only a memory of the same,  
 —And this beside, if you will not blame, 10  
 Your leave for one more last ride with me.

## II

My mistress bent that brow of hers;  
 Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs  
 When pity would be softening through,  
 Fixed me a breathing-while or two 15  
 With life or death in the balance: right!  
 The blood replenished me again;  
 My last thought was at least not vain:  
 I and my mistress, side by side  
 Shall be together, breathe and ride, 20  
 So, one day more am I deified.  
 Who knows but the world may end to-night?

## III

Hush! if you saw some western cloud *a*  
 All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed *a*  
 By many benedictions—sun's *b* 25  
 And moon's and evening-star's at once—*b*  
 And so, you, looking and loving best, *c*  
 Conscious grew, your passion drew *d*  
 Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too, *d*  
 Down on you, near and yet more near, *e* 30  
 Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—*e*  
 Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear! *e*  
 Thus lay she a moment on my breast. *e*

## IV

Then we began to ride. My soul,  
 Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll 35  
 Freshening and fluttering in the wind.  
 Past hopes already lay behind,  
 What need to strive with a life awry?  
 Had I said that, had I done this,

So might I gain, so might I miss. 40  
 Might she have loved me? just as well  
 She might have hated, who can tell?  
 Where had I been now if the worst befell?  
 And here we are riding, she and I.

## V

Fail I alone, in words and deeds? 45  
 Why, all men strive, and who succeeds? *None*  
 We rode; it seemed my spirit flew, *but not to love*  
 Saw other regions, cities new, *hope —*  
 As the world rushed by on either side. *The Heavens*  
 I thought,—All labour, yet no less *we aspired for*  
 Bear up beneath their unsuccess. *should be beyond* 50  
 Look at the end of work, contrast *our goals —*  
 The petty done, the undone vast, *only them is left*  
 This present of theirs with the hopeful past! *write it*  
 I hoped she would love me; here we ride. 55

## VI

What hand and brain went ever paired?  
 What heart alike conceived and dared?  
 What act proved all its thought had been?  
 What will but felt the fleshly screen?  
 We ride and I see her bosom heave. 60  
 There's many a crown for who can reach.  
 Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!  
 The flag stuck on a heap of bones,  
 A soldier's doing! what atones?  
 They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones. 65  
My riding is better, by their leave.

## VII

What does it all mean, poet? Well,  
 Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell  
 What we felt only; you expressed  
 You hold things beautiful the best, 70  
 And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.  
 'T is something, nay 't is much: but then,  
 Have you yourself what's best for men?  
 Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—

---

65. Honored by being buried in Westminster Abbey.

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

327

Nearer one whit your own sublime  
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?  
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

75

VIII

And you, great sculptor—so, you gave  
A score of years to Art, her slave,  
And that's your Venus, whence we turn  
To yonder girl that fords the burn!

80

You acquiesce, and shall I repine?  
What, man of music, you grown grey  
With notes and nothing else to say,  
Is this your sole praise from a friend,  
"Greatly his opera's strains intend,  
But in music we know how fashions end!"

85

I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

IX

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate  
Proposed bliss here should sublimate  
My being—had I signed the bond—  
Still one must lead some life beyond,

90

Have a bliss to die with, dim-described.  
This foot once planted on the goal,  
This glory-garland round my soul,  
Could I descry such? Try and test!  
I sink back shuddering from the quest.

95

Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?

Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X

And yet—she has not spoke so long!  
What if heaven be that, fair and strong  
At life's best, with our eyes upturned  
Whither life's flower is first discerned,

100

We, fixed so, ever should so abide?  
What if we still ride on, we two  
With life for ever old yet new,  
Changed not in kind but in degree,  
The instant made eternity,—

105

And heaven just prove that I and she

Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

110

## THE PATRIOT\*

## AN OLD STORY

## I

It was roses, roses, all the way,  
 With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:  
 The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,  
 The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,  
 A year ago on this very day. 5

## II

The air broke into a mist with bells,  
 The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.  
 Had I said, "Good folk, mere noise repels—  
 But give me your sun from yonder skies!"  
 They had answered, "And afterward, what else?" 10

## III

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun  
 To give it my loving friends to keep!  
 Nought man could do, have I left undone:  
 And you see my harvest, what I reap  
 This very day, now a year is run. 15

## IV

There 's nobody on the house-tops now—  
 Just a palsied few at the windows set;  
 For the best of the sight is, all allow,  
 At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,  
 By the very scaffold's foot, I trow. 20

\* This reflects the Brownings' interest in the attempt of Italy to free herself from Austria, though Browning denied that he had specifically in mind Arnold of Brescia, and dropped from stanza VI the name of Brescie (a Lombard town). Browning had witnessed the celebrations of Florence in March, 1849, when the Grand Duke was driven out; a few months later, Florence celebrated the return of the Grand Duke. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). It "is a more subtle delineation of the eve-of-execution subtheme than the several laments by Mary Queen of Scots indulged in by poets from Southwell to Wordsworth: the reader is enabled to delve deeper into the unnamed patriot's personality than the known Queen's." (B. W. Fuson, *The Dramatic Monolog in English Poetry Before Browning*, dissertation, Univ. of Iowa, 1942, 198.)

19. *Shambles' Gate*: the gate where animals are slaughtered.

## V

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,  
 A rope cuts both my wrists behind;  
 And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,  
 For they fling, whoever has a mind,  
 Stones at me for my year's misdeeds. 25

## VI

Thus I entered, and thus I go!  
 In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.  
 "Paid by the world, what dost thou owe  
 Me?"—God might question; now instead,  
 'T is God shall repay: I am safer so. 30

## MASTER HUGUES OF SAXE-GOTHA\*

## I

HIST, but a word, fair and soft!  
 Forth and be judged, Master Hugues!  
 Answer the question I 've put you so oft:  
 What do you mean by your mountainous fugues?  
 See, we're alone in the loft,— 5

## II

I, the poor organist here,  
 Hugues, the composer of note,  
 Dead though, and done with, this many a year:  
 Let's have a colloquy, something to quote,  
 Make the world prick up its ear! 10

30. Notice the optimistic discovery of good (for the individual) in this social evil, based upon a rather legalistic conception of God's justice.

\* An imaginary organist is speaking to Master Hugues, an imaginary composer. (Saxe-Gotha was the birthplace of Bach in 1685, but this fugue is of the preceding century.) The poem is to represent the temper of a fugue: The organist regards the "mountainous fugue" as a scholastic quarrel over a simple proposition or as an elaboration of religious ornament, casuistry, and traditionalism, obscuring God's truth and nature. The ideas of this poem (published in *Men and Women*, 1855) should be compared with the views on religion and nature expressed elsewhere by Browning, or by the clergyman-novelist Charles Kingsley, who treated Protestantism as something very close to naturalism.

## III

See, the church empties apace:

Fast they extinguish the lights.

Hallo there, sacristan! Five minutes' grace!

Here 's a crank pedal wants setting to rights,  
Baulks one of holding the base.

15

## IV

See, our huge house of the sounds,

Hushing its hundreds at once,

Bids the last loiterer back to his bounds!

—O you may challenge them, not a response  
Get the church-saints on their rounds!

20

## V

(Saints go their rounds, who shall doubt?

—March, with the moon to admire,

Up nave, down chancel, turn transept about,

Supervise all betwixt pavement and spire,

Put rats and mice to the rout—

25

## VI

Aloys and Jurien and Just—

Order things back to their place,

Have a sharp eye lest the candlesticks rust,

Rub the church-plate, darn the sacrament-lace,

Clear the desk-velvet of dust.)

30

## VII

Here 's your book, younger folks shelve!

Played I not off-hand and runningly,

Just now, your masterpiece, hard number twelve?

Here 's what should strike, could one handle it cunningly:  
Help the axe, give it a helve!

35

## VIII

Page after page as I played,

Every bar's rest, where one wipes

Sweat from one's brow, I looked up and surveyed,

O'er my three claviers, yon forest of pipes

Whence you still peeped in the shade.

40

26. *Aloys, Jurien, Just*: either patron saints of the church or sacristan's assistants.

39. *Clavier*: keyboard of the organ.

## IX

Sure you were wishful to speak?

You, with brow ruled like a score,

Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,

Like two great breves, as they wrote them of yore,

Each side that bar, your straight beak!

45

## X

Sure you said—"Good, the mere notes!

Still, couldst thou take my intent,

Know what procured me our Company's votes—

A master were lauded and sciolists shent,

Parted the sheep from the goats!"

50

## XI

Well then, speak up, never flinch!

Quick, ere my candle 's a snuff

—Burnt, do you see? to its uttermost inch—

I believe in you, but that 's not enough:

Give my conviction a clinch!

55

## XII

First you deliver your phrase

—Nothing propound, that I see,

Fit in itself for much blame or much praise—

Answered no less, where no answer needs be:

Off start the Two on their ways.

60

## XIII

Straight must a Third interpose,

Volunteer needlessly help;

In strikes a Fourth, a Fifth thrusts in his nose,

So the cry 's open, the kennel 's a-yelp,

Argument 's hot to the close.

65

## XIV

One dissertates, he is candid;

Two must discept,—has distinguished;

Three helps the couple, if ever yet man did;

Four protests; Five makes a dart at the thing wished:

Back to One, goes the case bandied.

70

44. *Breves*: the longest notes, formerly square in shape.

67. *Discept*: dispute.



## XV

One says his say with a difference;  
 More of expounding, explaining!  
 All now is wrangle, abuse, and vociferance;  
 Now there 's a truce, all 's subdued, self-restraining:  
 Five, though, stands out all the stiffer hence. 75

## XVI

One is incisive, corrosive;  
 Two retorts, nettled, curt, crepitant;  
 Three makes rejoinder, expansive, explosive;  
 Four overbears them all, strident and strepitant:  
 Five . . . O Danaides, O Sieve! 80

## XVII

Now, they ply axes and crowbars;  
 Now, they prick pins at a tissue  
 Fine as a skein of the casuist Escovar's  
 Worked on the bone of a lie. To what issue?  
 Where is our gain at the Two-bars? 85

## XXVIII

*Est fuga, volvitur rota.*  
 On we drift: where looms the dim port?  
 One, Two, Three, Four, Five, contribute their quota;  
 Something is gained, if one caught but the import—  
 Show it us, Hugues of Saxe-Gotha! 90

## XIX

What with affirming, denying,  
 Holding, risposting, subjoining,  
 All 's like . . . it 's like . . . for an instance I 'm trying . . .  
 There! See our roof, its gilt moulding and groining  
 Under those spider-webs lying! 95

77. *Crepitant*: crackling.

79. *Strepitant*: noisy.

80. *Danaides*: daughters of Danaus, condemned to pour water through a sieve forever.

83. Escobar y Mendoza of Valladolid (1589-1669) was a Jesuit casuist who found excuses for human faults, and was criticized by Pascal.

86. Latin for "It is a flight, the wheel revolves." *Fugue* is from *fuga*.

92. *Risposting*: in fencing, making a counter-stroke.

## XX

So your fugue broadens and thickens,  
 Greatens and deepens and lengthens,  
 Till we exclaim—"But where 's music, the dickens?  
 Blot ye the gold, while your spider-web strengthens  
 —Blacked to the stoutest of tickens?" 100

## XXI

I for man's effort am zealous:  
 Prove me such censure unfounded!  
 Seems it surprising a lover grows jealous—  
 Hopes 't was for something, his organ-pipes sounded,  
 Tiring three boys at the bellows? 105

## XXII

Is it your moral of Life?  
 Such a web, simple and subtle,  
 Weave we on earth here in impotent strife,  
 Backward and forward each throwing his shuttle,  
 Death ending all with a knife? 110

## XXIII

Over our heads truth and nature—  
 Still our life's zigzags and dodges,  
 Ins and outs, weaving a new legislature—  
 God's gold just shining its last where that lodges,  
 Palled beneath man's usurpature. 115

## XXIV

So we o'ershroud stars and roses,  
 Cherub and trophy and garland;  
 Nothings grow something which quietly closes  
 Heaven's earnest eye: not a glimpse of the far land  
 Gets through our comments and glozes. 120

100. *Ticken*: ticking, a fabric.

106 ff. Compare Shelley's *Adonais*, 462-3;

Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,  
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

## XXV

Ah but traditions, inventions,  
 (Say we and make up a visage)  
 So many men with such various intentions,  
 Down the past ages, must know more than this age!  
 Leave we the web its dimensions! 125

## XXVI

Who thinks Hugues wrote for the deaf,  
 Proved a mere mountain in labour?  
 Better submit; try again; what 's the clef?  
 'Faith, 't is no trifle for pipe and for tabor—  
 Four flats, the minor in F. 130

## XXVII

Friend, your fugue taxes the finger:  
 Learning it once, who would lose it?  
 Yet all the while a misgiving will linger,  
 Truth 's golden o'er us although we refuse it—  
 Nature, thro' cobwebs we string her. 135

## XXVIII

Hugues! I advise *meâ poenâ*  
 (Counterpoint glares like a Gorgon)  
 Bid One, Two, Three, Four, Five, clear the arena!  
 Say the word, straight I unstop the full-organ,  
 Blare out the *mode Palestrina*. 140

## XXIX

While in the roof, if I 'm right there,  
 . . . Lo you, the wick in the socket!  
 Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there!  
 Down it dips, gone like a rocket.  
 What, you want, do you, to come unawares, 145  
 Sweeping the church up for first morning-prayers,  
 And find a poor devil has ended his cares  
 At the foot of your rotten-runged rat-riddled stairs?  
 Do I carry the moon in my pocket?

136. *Meâ poenâ*: at my risk of punishment.

140. *Mode Palestrina*: in the style of Palestrina (1524-94) who emancipated music from pedantries and subtleties, bringing it back to simplicity and melody. Browning would consider him parallel in music with Pascal in theology.

## BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY\*

No more wine? then we'll push back chairs and talk.  
 A final glass for me, though: cool, i' faith!  
 We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.  
 It's different, preaching in basilicas,  
 And doing duty in some masterpiece 5  
 Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart!  
 I doubt if they're half baked, those chalk rosettes,  
 Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere;  
 It's just like breathing in a lime-kiln: eh?  
 These hot long ceremonies of our church 10  
 Cost us a little—oh, they pay the price,  
 You take me—amply pay it! Now, we'll talk.

\* Browning admitted that his model for Bishop Blougram was Cardinal Wiseman (1802-1865), a leader of the Catholic revival in Victorian England. Upon the publication of the poem in *Men and Women* (1855), Cardinal Wiseman himself reviewed it in a Roman Catholic periodical, *The Rambler* (January, 1856), declaring that this apology is "utterly mistaken in the very groundwork of religion"; and concluding: "Though much of the matter is extremely offensive to Catholics, yet beneath the surface there is an undercurrent of thought that is by no means inconsistent with our religion; and if Mr. Browning is a man of will and action, and not a mere dreamer and talker, we should never feel surprise at his conversion." Wiseman certainly ascribed to Browning views that the poet did not endorse. Yet it is very difficult to say just when the argument is intended as that of an evil casuist, and when it has Browning's approval. Some of these arguments he has set forth elsewhere; and Blougram's philosophy is closer to that of Browning than to that of a genuine Catholic. As an example of a real Victorian Catholic's "apology" for his beliefs, compare Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864-5), noting especially the argument, method, and psychological self-revelation.

Lafcadio Hearn says of the poem, "We know that the bishop is morally wrong the whole way through, that every statement which he makes is wrong; yet it would take a clever man to prove him wrong. The logic is too well managed. Few psychological studies are comparable to this" (*Appreciations of Poetry*, p. 232).

3. *Abbey*: Westminster. See note to 54.

6. A. W. N. Pugin (1812-1852), architect, was a Catholic who considered Gothic architecture suitable for churches, and was one of the first Victorians to emphasize the esthetic element in religion. The Neo-Gothic style of many modern ecclesiastical and academic buildings may be traced back to his influence.

13. *Gigadibs*: the journalist whose superficial attacks have stirred the Bishop to defend himself in terms that even Gigadibs can appreciate. DeVane (*Browning Handbook*, pp. 214-5) suspects that the model for this figure was "Father Prout" (F. S. Mahony) of the staff of *Fraser's Magazine*,

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.  
 No deprecation,—nay, I beg you, sir!  
 Beside 't is our engagement: don't you know, 15  
 I promised, if you'd watch a dinner out,  
 We'd see truth dawn together?—truth that peeps  
 Over the glasses' edge when dinner's done,  
 And body gets its sop and holds its noise  
 And leaves soul free a little. Now's the time: 20  
 Truth's break of day! You do despise me then.  
 And if I say, "despise me,"—never fear!  
 I know you do not in a certain sense—  
 Not in my arm-chair, for example: here,  
 I well imagine you respect my place 25  
 (*Status, entourage, worldly circumstance*)  
 Quite to its value—very much indeed:  
 —Are up to the protesting eyes of you  
 In pride at being seated here for once—  
 You'll turn it to such capital account! 30  
 When somebody, through years and years to come,  
 Hints of the bishop,—names me—that's enough:  
 "Blougram? I knew him"—(into it you slide)  
 "Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,  
 All alone, we two; he's a clever man: 35  
 And after dinner,—why, the wine you know,—  
 Oh, there was wine, and good!—what with the wine . . .  
 'Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk!  
 He's no bad fellow, Blougram; he had seen  
 Something of mine he relished, some review: 40  
 He's quite above their humbug in his heart,  
 Half-said as much, indeed—the thing's his trade.  
 I warrant, Blougram's sceptical at times:  
 How otherwise? I liked him, I confess!"  
*Che che*, my dear sir, as we say at Rome, 45  
 Don't you protest now! It's fair give and take;

---

who had many conversations with the Brownings in Florence, and who may even have presented Blougram's argument to them. But since Mahony was an ex-Jesuit, his apologies would surely have been more Catholic than this.

34. *Corpus Christi*: literally "Body of Christ," the Feast of the Sacrament of the Altar, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday.

45. *Che*: Italian for "what."

You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths:  
The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays—  
You do despise me; your ideal of life 50  
Is not the bishop's: you would not be I.  
You would like better to be Goethe, now,  
Or Buonaparte, or, bless me, lower still,  
Count D'Orsay,—so you did what you preferred,  
Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help, 55  
Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,  
So long as on that point, whate'er it was,  
You loosed your mind, were whole and sole yourself.  
—That, my ideal never can include,  
Upon that element of truth and worth 60  
Never be based! for say they make me Pope—  
(They can't—suppose it for our argument!)  
Why, there I'm at my tether's end, I've reached  
My height, and not a height which pleases you:  
An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say. 65  
It's like those eerie stories nurses tell,  
Of how some actor on a stage played Death,  
With pasteboard crown, sham orb and tinselled dart,  
And called himself the monarch of the world;  
Then, going in the tire-room afterward, 70  
Because the play was done, to shift himself,  
Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly,  
The moment he had shut the closet door,  
By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope  
At unawares, ask what his baubles mean, 75  
And whose part he presumed to play just now.  
Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true!

54. *Count D'Orsay*: famous dandy. Since he (and "brother Pugin") died in 1852, this poem was probably written soon after the appearance of *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* in 1850. It was in 1850 that Protestant England was stirred to great suspicion and anger by the reestablishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England, with Wiseman as Archbishop of Westminster. Line 3, suggesting that Englishmen with Browning's background were still afraid that this "Papal Aggression" would prove a serious menace to national institutions, is most likely to have been written at this early date. See note to 704.

So, drawing comfortable breath again,  
 You weigh and find, whatever more or less  
 I boast of my ideal realized 80  
 Is nothing in the balance when opposed  
 To your ideal, your grand simple life,  
 Of which you will not realize one jot.  
 I am much, you are nothing; you would be all,  
 I would be merely much: you beat me there. 85  
 No, friend, you do not beat me: hearken why!  
 The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,  
 Is—not to fancy what were fair in life  
 Provided it could be,—but, finding first  
 What may be, then find how to make it fair 90  
 Up to our means: a very different thing!  
 No abstract intellectual plan of life  
 Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,  
 But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,  
 May lead within a world which (by your leave) 95  
 Is Rome or London, not Fool's-paradise.  
 Embellish Rome, idealize away,  
 Make paradise of London if you can,  
 You're welcome, nay, you're wise.

## A simile!

We mortals cross the ocean of this world 100  
 Each in his average cabin of a life;  
 The best's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.  
 Now for our six months' voyage—how prepare?  
 You come on shipboard with a landsman's list  
 Of things he calls convenient: so they are! 105  
 An India screen is pretty furniture,  
 A piano-forte is a fine resource,  
 All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,  
 The new edition fifty volumes long;  
 And little Greek books, with the funny type 110  
 They get up well at Leipsic, fill the next:  
 Go on! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes!

80-85. It is clear from "Rabbi Ben Erza," "Andrea del Sarto," "Old Pictures in Florence," "A Grammarian's Funeral," *etc.*, that Browning himself prefers the unattainable ideal to perfection on a lower level.

And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add!  
 'T were pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow  
 Hang full in face of one where'er one roams, 115  
 Since he more than the others brings with him  
 Italy's self,—the marvellous Modenese!—  
 Yet was not on your list before, perhaps.  
 —Alas, friend, here's the agent . . . is't the name?  
 The captain, or whoever's master here— 120  
 You see him screw his face up; what's his cry  
 Ere you set foot on shipboard? "Six feet square!"  
 If you won't understand what six feet mean,  
 Compute and purchase stores accordingly—  
 And if, in pique because he overhauls 125  
 Your Jerome, piano, bath, you come on board  
 Bare—why, you cut a figure at the first  
 While sympathetic landsmen see you off;  
 Not afterward, when long ere half seas over,  
 You peep up from your utterly naked boards 130  
 Into some snug and well-appointed berth,  
 Like mine for instance (try the cooler jug—  
 Put back the other, but don't jog the ice!)  
 And mortified you mutter "Well and good;  
 He sits enjoying his sea-furniture; 135  
 'T is stout and proper, and there's store of it:  
 Though I've the better notion, all agree,  
 Of fitting rooms up. Hang the carpenter,  
 Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances—  
 I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all!" 140  
 And meantime you bring nothing: never mind—  
 You've proved your artist-nature: what you don't  
 You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let's backward to the starting-place.  
 See my way: we're two college friends, suppose. 145  
 Prepare together for our voyage, then;  
 Each note and check the other in his work,—  
 Here's mine, a bishop's outfit; criticize!  
 What's wrong? why won't you be a bishop too?

113. *Parma's Pride, the Jerome*: picture of St. Jerome in the Ducal Academy at Parma, by the Italian painter Correggio (1494-1534).

117. *Modenese*: Correggio was born in Modena.



Why first, you don't believe, you don't and can't, 150  
 (Not statedly, that is, and fixedly  
 And absolutely and exclusively)  
 In any revelation called divine.  
 No dogmas nail your faith; and what remains  
 But say so, like the honest man you are? 155  
 First, therefore, overhaul theology!  
 Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,  
 Must find believing every whit as hard:  
 And if I do not frankly say as much,  
 The ugly consequence is clear enough. 160

Now wait, my friend: well, I do not believe—  
 If you'll accept no faith that is not fixed,  
 Absolute and exclusive, as you say.  
 You're wrong—I mean to prove it in due time.  
 Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie 165  
 I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,  
 So give up hope accordingly to solve—  
 (To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then  
 With both of us, though in unlike degree,  
 Missing full credence—overboard with them! 170  
 I mean to meet you on your own premise:  
 Good, there go mine in company with yours!

And now what are we? unbelievers both,  
 Calm and complete, determinately fixed  
 To-day, to-morrow, and for ever, pray? 175  
 You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!  
 In no wise! all we've gained is, that belief,  
 As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,  
 Confounds us like its predecessor. Where's  
 The gain? how can we guard our unbelief, 180  
 Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.  
 Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,  
 A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,  
 A chorus-ending from Euripides,—

161-2. Blougram's kind of "faith" without certainty is that of Browning himself—as he expresses it in "Easter-Day," 71-72, etc. It is *not* like the Catholic faith which St. Thomas Aquinas defines as voluntary assent accompanied by certainty.

184. *Euripides*: Browning's favorite Greek dramatist, whose choruses

And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears 185  
 As old and new at once as nature's self,  
 To rap and knock and enter in our soul,  
 Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,  
 Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—  
 The grand Perhaps! We look on helplessly. 190  
 There the old misgivings, crooked questions are—  
 This good God,—what he could do, if he would,  
 Would, if he could—then must have done long since:  
 If so, when, where, and how? some way must be,—  
 Once feel about, and soon or late you hit 195  
 Some sense, in which it might be, after all.  
 Why not, "The Way, the Truth, the Life?"

—That way

Over the mountain, which who stands upon  
 Is apt to doubt if it be meant for a road;  
 While, if he views it from the waste itself, 200  
 Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,  
 Not vague, mistakeable! what's a break or two  
 Seen from the unbroken desert either side?  
 And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)  
 What if the breaks themselves should prove at last 205  
 The most consummate of contrivances  
 To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith?  
 And so we stumble at truth's very test!  
 All we have gained then by our unbelief  
 Is a life of doubt diversified by faith, 210  
 For one of faith diversified by doubt:  
 We called the chess-board white,—we call it black.

"Well," you rejoin, "the end's no worse, at least;  
 We've reason for both colours on the board:  
 Why not confess then, where I drop the faith 215  
 And you the doubt, that I'm as right as you?"

---

sometimes end with a declaration of the necessity of submitting to life as it is.

207. On this point Browning certainly agrees with Blougram. This theory is elaborated in "A Death in the Desert," where he puts it into the mouth of St. John himself: "Therefore, I say, to test men, the proofs shift" (295; cf. 589-93).

Because, friend, in the next place, this being so,  
 And both things even,—faith and unbelief  
 Left to a man's choice,—we'll proceed a step,  
 Returning to our image, which I like. 220

A man's choice, yes—but a cabin-passenger's—  
 The man made for the special life o' the world—  
 Do you forget him? I remember though!  
 Consult our ship's conditions and you find  
 One and but one choice suitable to all; 225  
 The choice, that you unluckily prefer,  
 Turning things topsy-turvy—they or it  
 Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief  
 Bears upon life, determines its whole course,  
 Begins at its beginning. See the world 230  
 Such as it is,—you made it not, nor I;  
 I mean to take it as it is,—and you,  
 Not so you'll take it,—though you get naught else.  
 I know the special kind of life I like,  
 What suits the most my idiosyncrasy, 235  
 Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit  
 In power, peace, pleasantness, and length of days.  
 I find that positive belief does this  
 For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.  
 —For you, it does, however?—that, we'll try! 240  
 'T is clear, I cannot lead my life, at least,  
 Induce the world to let me peaceably,  
 Without declaring at the outset, "Friends,  
 I absolutely and peremptorily  
 Believe!"—I say, faith is my waking life: 245  
 One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,  
 We know, but waking's the main point with us  
 And my provision's for life's waking part.  
 Accordingly, I use heart, head, and hand  
 All day, I build, scheme, study, and make friends; 250  
 And when night overtakes me, down I lie,

232. *To take it as it is*: Browning's own attitude towards the world. Contrast, in the same cause, Newman's argument from the evil (not the good things) of the world, in the last chapter of his *Apologia*. Cf. Romans, xii, 2, "And be not conformed to this world. . . ."

Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,  
 The sooner the better, to begin afresh.  
 What's midnight doubt before the dayspring's faith?  
 You, the philosopher, that disbelieve, 255  
 That recognize the night, give dreams their weight—  
 To be consistent you should keep your bed,  
 Abstain from healthy acts that prove you man,  
 For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares!  
 And certainly at night you'll sleep and dream, 260  
 Live through the day and bustle as you please.  
 And so you live to sleep as I to wake,  
 To unbelieve as I to still believe?  
 Well, and the common sense o' the world calls you  
 Bed-ridden,—and its good things come to me. 265  
 Its estimation, which is half the fight,  
 That's the first-cabin comfort I secure:  
 The next . . . but you perceive with half an eye!  
 Come, come, it's best believing, if we may;  
 You can't but own that!

Next, concede again, 270  
 If once we choose belief, on all accounts  
 We can't be too decisive in our faith,  
 Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,  
 To suit the world which gives us the good things.  
 In every man's career are certain points 275  
 Whereon he dares not be indifferent;  
 The world detects him clearly, if he dare,  
 As baffled at the game, and losing life.  
 He may care little or he may care much  
 For riches, honour, pleasure, work, repose, 280  
 Since various theories of life and life's  
 Success are extant which might easily  
 Comport with either estimate of these;  
 And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,  
 Labour or quiet, is not judged a fool 285  
 Because his fellow would choose otherwise:  
 We let him choose upon his own account  
 So long as he's consistent with his choice.  
 But certain points, left wholly to himself,  
 When once a man has arbitrated on, 290

We say he must succeed there or go hang.  
 Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most  
 Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need—  
 For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch,  
 Or follow, at the least, sufficiently, 295  
 The form of faith his conscience holds the best,  
 Whate'er the process of conviction was:  
 For nothing can compensate his mistake  
 On such a point, the man himself being judge:  
 He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul. 300

Well now, there's one great form of Christian faith  
 I happened to be born in—which to teach  
 Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,  
 As best and readiest means of living by;  
 The same on examination being proved 305  
 The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise  
 And absolute form of faith in the whole world—  
 Accordingly, most potent of all forms  
 For working on the world. Observe, my friend!  
 Such as you know me, I am free to say, 310  
 In these hard latter days which hamper one,  
 Myself—by no immoderate exercise  
 Of intellect and learning, but the tact  
 To let external forces work for me,  
 —Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread; 315  
 Bid Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's,  
 Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world  
 And make my life an ease and joy and pride;  
 It does so,—which for me's a great point gained,  
 Who have a soul and body that exact 320  
 A comfortable care in many ways.  
 There's power in me and will to dominate  
 Which I must exercise, they hurt me else:  
 In many ways I need mankind's respect,  
 Obedience, and the love that's born of fear: 325  
 While at the same time, there's a taste I have,

301 ff. Cf. "Christmas Eve," 271-3.

316. The Popes trace their authority back to that of St. Peter. Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85) claimed temporal power and supremacy.

A toy of soul, a titillating thing,  
 Refuses to digest these dainties crude.  
 The naked life is gross till clothed upon:  
 I must take what men offer, with a grace 330  
 As though I would not, could I help it, take!  
 An uniform I wear though over-rich—  
 Something imposed on me, no choice of mine;  
 No fancy-dress worn for pure fancy's sake  
 And despicable therefore! now folk kneel 335  
 And kiss my hand—of course the Church's hand.  
 Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,  
 And thus that it should be I have procured;  
 And thus it could not be another way,  
 I venture to imagine.

You'll reply, 340  
 So far my choice, no doubt, is a success;  
 But were I made of better elements,  
 With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,  
 I hardly would account the thing success  
 Though it did all for me I say.

But, friend, 345  
 We speak of what is; not of what might be,  
 And how 't were better if 't were otherwise.  
 I am the man you see here plain enough:  
 Grant I'm a beast, why, beasts must lead beasts' lives!  
 Suppose I own at once to tail and claws; 350  
 The tailless man exceeds me: but being tailed  
 I'll lash out lion fashion, and leave apes  
 To dock their stump and dress their haunches up.  
 My business is not to remake myself,  
 But make the absolute best of what God made. 355  
 Or—our first simile—though you prove me doomed  
 To a viler berth still, to the steerage-hole,  
 The sheep-pen or the pig-stye, I should strive  
 To make what use of each were possible;  
 And as this cabin gets upholstery, 360  
 That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

349. Cf. "Fra Lippo Lippi," 270, and the argument at that point.  
 354-5. Browning's own attitude is well summarized in these lines.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast  
 I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes  
 Enumerated so complacently,  
 On the mere ground that you forsooth can find 365  
 In this particular life I choose to lead  
 No fit provision for them. Can you not?  
 Say you, my fault is I address myself  
 To grosser estimators than should judge?  
 And that's no way of holding up the soul, 370  
 Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows  
 One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools'—  
 Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes that.  
 I pine among my million imbeciles  
 (You think) aware some dozen men of sense 375  
 Eye me and know me, whether I believe  
 In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,  
 And am a fool, or disbelieve in her  
 And am a knave,—approve in neither case,  
 Withhold their voices though I look their way: 380  
 Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end  
 (The thing they gave at Florence,—what's its name?)  
 While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang  
 His orchestra of salt-box, tongs, and bones,  
 He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths 385  
 Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here—  
 That even your prime men who appraise their kind  
 Are men still, catch a wheel within a wheel,  
 See more in a truth than the truth's simple self, 390  
 Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street  
 Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?  
 You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;  
 Him you must watch—he's sure to fall, yet stands!  
 Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things. 395  
 The honest thief, the tender murderer,

381. *Verdi*: Italian composer of operas who turned from the applause of the multitude to learn the verdict of another musician, Rossini; the opera referred to here is "Macbeth."

395-401. An excellent statement of Browning's own interests, as his poetry demonstrates.

The superstitious atheist, demirep  
 That loves and saves her soul in new French books—  
 We watch while these in equilibrium keep  
 The giddy line midway: one step aside, 400  
 They're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line  
 Before your sages,—just the men to shrink  
 From the gross weights, coarse scales, and labels broad  
 You offer their refinement. Fool or knave?  
 Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave 405  
 When there's a thousand diamond weights between?  
 So, I enlist them. Your picked twelve, you'll find,  
 Profess themselves indignant, scandalized  
 At thus being held unable to explain  
 How a superior man who disbelieves 410  
 May not believe as well: that's Schelling's way!  
 It's through my coming in the tail of time,  
 Nicking the minute with a happy tact.  
 Had I been born three hundred years ago  
 They'd say, "What's strange? Blougram of course believes;" 415  
 And, seventy years since, "disbelieves of course."  
 But now, "He may believe; and yet, and yet  
 How can he?" All eyes turn with interest.  
 Whereas, step off the line on either side—  
 You, for example, clever to a fault, 420  
 The rough and ready man who write apace,  
 Read somewhat seldomer, think perhaps even less—  
 You disbelieve! Who wonders and who cares?  
 Lord So-and-so—his coat bedropped with wax,  
 All Peter's chains about his waist, his back 425  
 Brave with the needlework of Noodledom—  
 Believes! Again, who wonders and who cares?  
 But I, the man of sense and learning too,  
 The able to think yet act, the this, the that,  
 I, to believe at this late time of day! 430  
 Enough; you see, I need not fear contempt.

—Except it's yours! Admire me as these may,  
 You don't. But whom at least do you admire?  
 Present your own perfection, your ideal,

411. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling was a German philosopher (1775-1854).



Your pattern man for a minute—oh, make haste, 435  
 Is it Napoleon you would have us grow?  
 Concede the means; allow his head and hand,  
 (A large concession, clever as you are)  
 Good! In our common primal element  
 Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know— 440  
 We're still at that admission, recollect!)  
 Where do you find—apart from, towering o'er  
 The secondary temporary aims  
 Which satisfy the gross taste you despise—  
 Where do you find his star?—his crazy trust 445  
 God knows through what or in what? it's alive  
 And shines and leads him, and that's all we want.  
 Have we aught in our sober night shall point  
 Such ends as his were, and direct the means  
 Of working out our purpose straight as his, 450  
 Nor bring a moment's trouble on success  
 With after-care to justify the same?  
 —Be a Napoleon, and yet disbelieve—  
 Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away!  
 What's the vague good o' the world, for which you dare 455  
 With comfort to yourself blow millions up?  
 We neither of us see it! we do see  
 The blown-up millions—spatter of their brains  
 And writhing of their bowels and so forth,  
 In that bewildering entanglement 460  
 Of horrible eventualities  
 Past calculation to the end of time!  
 Can I mistake for some clear word of God  
 (Which were my ample warrant for it all)  
 His puff of hazy instinct, idle talk, 465  
 "The State, that's I," quack-nonsense about crowns,  
 And (when one beats the man to his last hold)  
 A vague idea of setting things to rights,  
 Policing people efficaciously,  
 More to their profit, most of all to his own; 470  
 The whole to end that dimmest of ends  
 By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the Church,

472. *Austrian marriage*: of Marie Louise, Hapsburg princess, to Napoleon Bonaparte, who had begun as a revolutionary leader and came to seek an alliance with ultra-reactionary rulers.

And resurrection of the old *régime*?  
 Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,  
 Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such? 475  
 No: for, concede me but the merest chance  
 Doubt may be wrong—there's judgment, life to come!  
 With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves right?  
 This present life is all?—you offer me  
 Its dozen noisy years, without a chance 480  
 That wedding an archduchess, wearing lace,  
 And getting called by divers new-coined names,  
 Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,  
 Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like!  
 Therefore I will not.

Take another case; 485  
 Fit up the cabin yet another way.  
 What say you to the poets? shall we write  
 Hamlet, Othello—make the world our own,  
 Without a risk to run of either sort?  
 I can't!—to put the strongest reason first. 490  
 "But try," you urge, "the trying shall suffice;  
 The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life:  
 Try to be Shakespeare, leave the rest to fate!"  
 Spare my self-knowledge—there's no fooling me!  
 If I prefer remaining my poor self, 495  
 I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.  
 If I'm a Shakespeare, let the well alone;  
 Why should I try to be what now I am?  
 If I'm no Shakespeare, as too probable,—  
 His power and consciousness and self-delight 500  
 And all we want in common, shall I find—  
 Trying for ever? while on points of taste  
 Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I  
 Are dowered alike—I'll ask you, I or he,  
 Which in our two lives realizes most? 505  
 Much, he imagined—somewhat, I possess.  
 He had the imagination; stick to that!  
 Let him say, "In the face of my soul's works

475. *Austerlitz*: Battle won by Napoleon in 1805.

492. Cf. "Andrea del Sarto," 97-98; "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 40-41 and 142-150.

Your world is worthless and I touch it not  
 Lest I should wrong them"—I'll withdraw my plea 510  
 But does he say so? look upon his life!  
 Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.  
 He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces  
 To build the trimmest house in Stratford town;  
 Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things, 515  
 Giulio Romano's pictures, Dowland's lute;  
 Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,  
 And none more, had he seen its entry once,  
 Than "Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal."  
 Why then should I who play that personage, 520  
 The very Pandulph Shakespeare's fancy made,  
 Be told that had the poet chanced to start  
 From where I stand now (some degree like mine  
 Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)  
 He would have run the whole race back, forsooth, 525  
 And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays?  
 Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best!  
 Did Shakespeare live, he could but sit at home  
 And get himself in dreams the Vatican,  
 Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls, 530  
 And English books, none equal to his own,  
 Which I read, bound in gold (he never did).  
 —Terni's fall, Naples' bay, and Gothard's top—  
 Eh, friend? I could not fancy one of these;  
 But, as I pour this claret, there they are: 535  
 I've gained them—crossed St. Gothard last July  
 With ten mules to the carriage and a bed  
 Slung inside; is my hap the worse for that?  
 We want the same things, Shakespeare and myself,

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513. *Towers and gorgeous palaces*: this phrase is from Prospero's famous speech, "We are such stuff as dreams are made of," in Shakespeare's *Tempest* (IV, i, 152).

514. When Shakespeare had made his fortune in the city he retired to live in the best house in his home town.

516. *Giulio Romano*: Italian painter (1492–1546), mentioned in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, V, ii, 105. *Dowland*: English musician praised in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (ascribed to Shakespeare).

519. Quoted from *King John*, III, i, 138.

533. *Terni's fall*: beautiful cataract north of Rome.

536. *St. Gothard*: the principal pass from Italy to Switzerland.

And what I want, I have: he, gifted more, 350  
 Could fancy he too had them when he liked,  
 But not so thoroughly that, if fate allowed,  
 He would not have them also in my sense.  
 We play one game; I send the ball aloft  
 No less adroitly that of fifty strokes 545  
 Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high  
 Which sends them back to me: I wish and get.  
 He struck balls higher and with better skill,  
 But at a poor fence level with his head,  
 And hit—his Stratford house, a coat of arms, 550  
 Successful dealings in his grain and wool,—  
 While I receive heaven's incense in my nose  
 And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.  
 Ask him, if this life's all, who wins the game?

Believe—and our whole argument breaks up. 555  
 Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat;  
 Only, we can't command it; fire and life  
 Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree:  
 And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,  
 The fact's the same,—belief's fire, once in us, 560  
 Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself:  
 We penetrate our life with such a glow  
 As fire lends wood and iron—this turns steel,  
 That burns to ash—all's one, fire proves its power  
 For good or ill, since men call flare success. 565  
 But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.  
 Light one in me, I'll find it food enough!  
 Why, to be Luther—that's a life to lead,  
 Incomparably better than my own.  
 He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he says, 570  
 Sets up God's rule again by simple means,  
 Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.  
 He flared out in the flaring of mankind;  
 Such Luther's luck was: how shall such be mine?  
 If he succeeded, nothing's left to do: 575  
 And if he did not altogether—well,

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556 ff. Blougram is now expressing Browning's own romantic, evangelical views.

Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be  
 I might be also. But to what result?  
 He looks upon no future: Luther did.  
 What can I gain on the denying side? 580  
 Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,  
 Read the text right, emancipate the world—  
 The emancipated world enjoys itself  
 With scarce a thank-you: Blougram told it first  
 It could not owe a farthing,—not to him 585  
 More than Saint Paul! 't would press its pay, you think?  
 Then add there's still that plaguy hundredth chance  
 Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run—  
 For what gain? not for Luther's, who secured  
 A real heaven in his heart throughout his life, 590  
 Supposing death a little altered things.

"Ay, but since really you lack faith," you cry,  
 "You run the same risk really on all sides,  
 In cool indifference as bold unbelief.  
 As well be Strauss as swing 'twixt Paul and him. 595  
 It's not worth having, such imperfect faith,  
 No more available to do faith's work  
 Than unbelief like mine. Whole faith, or none!"

Softly, my friend! I must dispute that point.  
 Once own the use of faith, I'll find you faith. 600  
 We're back on Christian ground. You call for faith:  
 I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.  
 The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,  
 If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?  
 By life and man's free will, God gave for that! 605  
 To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice:  
 That's our one act, the previous work's his own.  
 You criticise the soul? it reared this tree—

577. *Strauss*: David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) whose *Life of Jesus* (translated by "George Eliot") made him, in Browning's eyes, the leading rationalist of the Tübingen school of Biblical criticism, which Browning in "Christmas Eve" attacks as inferior to Catholicism or the vulgarest Dissenter "Fundamentalism."

603–4. Cf. this characteristic idea of Browning's with the *Credo quia absurdum* ("I believe it because it is absurd") of Tertullian, one of the earliest Church Fathers.

This broad life and whatever fruit it bears!  
 What matter though I doubt at every pore, 610  
 Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,  
 Doubts in the trivial work of every day,  
 Doubts at the very bases of my soul  
 In the grand moments when she probes herself—  
 If finally I have a life to show, 615  
 The thing I did, brought out in evidence  
 Against the thing done to me underground  
 By hell and all its brood, for aught I know?  
 I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?  
 All's doubt in me; where's break of faith in this? 620  
 It is the idea, the feeling and the love,  
 God means mankind should strive for and show forth  
 Whatever be the process to that end,—  
 And not historic knowledge, logic sound,  
 And metaphysical acumen, sure! 625  
 "What think ye of Christ," friend? when all's done and said,  
 Like you this Christianity or not?  
 It may be false, but will you wish it true?  
 Has it your vote to be so if it can?  
 Trust you an instinct silenced long ago 630  
 That will break silence and enjoin you love  
 What mortified philosophy is hoarse,  
 And all in vain, with bidding you despise?  
 If you desire faith—then you've faith enough:  
 What else seeks God—nay, what else seek ourselves? 635  
 You form a notion of me, we'll suppose,  
 On hearsay; it's a favourable one:  
 "But still" (you add), "there was no such good man,  
 Because of contradiction in the facts.  
 One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome, 640

626. The quotation is from Matthew, xxii, 42.

634. Contrast the Catholic philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas, who, far from calling it "faith," would not even call it "opinion": "the intellect assents to something, not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other: and if this be accompanied by doubt and fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion, while, if there be certainty, and no fear of the opposite side, there will be faith." *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. i, A. 4 (tr. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, London, 1917, pp. 9-10). Compare "Easter-Day," 124-6.

640. Wiseman was born of Anglo-Irish parents in Seville, Spain.

This Blougram; yet throughout the tales of him  
I see he figures as an Englishman."

Well, the two things are reconcilable.

But would I rather you discovered that,  
Subjoining—"Still, what matter though they be?  
Blougram concerns me naught, born here or there."

645

Pure faith indeed—you know not what you ask!

Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,

Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much

The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.

650

It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare.

Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth:

I say it's meant to hide him all it can,

And that's what all the blessed evil's for.

Its use in Time is to environ us,

655

Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough

Against that sight till we can bear its stress.

Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain

And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart

Less certainly would wither up at once

660

Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.

But time and earth case-harden us to live;

The feeblest sense is trusted most; the child

Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,

Plays on and grows to be a man like us.

665

With me, faith means perpetual unbelief

Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot

Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.

Or, if that's too ambitious,—here's my box—

I need the excitation of a pinch

670

Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose

Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.

"Leave it in peace," advise the simple folk:

652-3. The view rejected by the "Bishop" is that of Catholicism. The view expressed is one developed by the Victorians.

654. The poet's direct expressions of optimism endorse this view of evil (e.g., in *Parleyings with Certain People*). Notice what a direct vision of spiritual truths did to Karshish.

657-661. Cf. "A Death in the Desert," 198-205.

667. In Raphael's paintings of St. Michael slaying the dragon.

Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,  
Say I—let doubt occasion still more faith! 675

You'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,  
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.  
How you'd exult if I could put you back  
Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,  
Geology, ethnology, what not, 680  
(Greek endings, each the little passing-bell  
That signifies some faith's about to die),  
And set you square with Genesis again,—  
When such a traveller told you his last news,  
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat 685  
But did not climb there since 't was getting dusk  
And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot!  
How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,  
How act? As other people felt and did;  
With soul more blank than this decanter's knob, 690  
Believe—and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate  
Full in belief's face, like the beast you'd be!

No, when the fight begins within himself,  
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,  
Satan looks up between his feet—both tug— 695  
He's left, himself, i' the middle: the soul wakes  
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!  
Never leave growing till the life to come!  
Here, we've got callous to the Virgin's winks  
That used to puzzle people wholesomely: 700  
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.  
What are the laws of nature, not to bend  
If the Church bid them?—brother Newman asks.

702-3. John Henry Newman had been a leader of the (Anglo-Catholic) 'Oxford Movement in the English Church until he became a Roman Catholic in 1845. He wrote in defense of belief in miracles. *E.g.* "I think it impossible to withstand the evidence which is brought for the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples, and for the motion of the eyes of the pictures of the Madonna in the Roman States. . . . Many men, when they hear an educated man so speak, will at once impute the avowal to insanity, or to an idiosyncrasy, or to imbecility of mind, or to decrepitude of powers, or to fanaticism, or to hypocrisy. They have a right to say so if they will . . ." (*Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics*, Longmans ed.)



Up with the Immaculate Conception, then—  
 On to the rack with faith!—is my advice. 705  
 Will not that hurry us upon our knees,  
 Knocking our breasts, "It can't be—yet it shall!  
 Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope?  
 Low things confound the high things!" and so forth.  
 That's better than acquitting God with grace 710  
 As some folk do. He's tried—no case is proved,  
 Philosophy is lenient—he may go!

You'll say, the old system's not so obsolete  
 But men believe still: ay, but who and where?  
 King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet 715  
 The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes;  
 But even of these, what ragamuffin-saint  
 Believes God watches him continually,  
 As he believes in fire that it will burn,  
 Or rain that it will drench him? Break fire's law, 720  
 Sin against rain, although the penalty  
 Be just a singe or soaking? "No," he smiles;  
 "Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves."

The sum of all is—yes, my doubt is great,  
 My faith's still greater, then my faith's enough. 725  
 I have read much, thought much, experienced much,  
 Yet would die rather than avow my fear  
 The Naples' liquefaction may be false,  
 When set to happen by the palace-clock  
 According to the clouds or dinner-time. 730  
 I hear you recommend, I might at least

London 1918, 312–313). This and other passages from Newman are quoted by C. R. Tracy as parallel to lines 374–9, 726–744, etc., in "Bishop Blougram," *Mod. Lang. Rev.* XXXIV (July, 1939) 422–425.

704. *Immaculate Conception*: a dogma defined as "of the faith" in December, 1854, by Pope Pius IX, who in 1851 had appointed a commission to investigate the subject.

715. *King Bomba*: nickname (meaning "Liar") of Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies; *lazzaroni*: beggars.

716. *Antonelli*: Cardinal, secretary of Pope Pius IX.

728. A small solid drop of the blood of Naples' patron saint, Januarius, is believed to become liquid on the public occasion of the Feast of St. Januarius, each year, September nineteenth. Browning, however, is in error in thinking that belief in this kind of miracle is *required* of Catholics.

Eliminate, decrassify my faith  
 Since I adopt it; keeping what I must  
 And leaving what I can—such points as this.  
 I won't—that is, I can't throw one away. 735  
 Supposing there's no truth in what I hold  
 About the need of trial to man's faith,  
 Still, when you bid me purify the same,  
 To such a process I discern no end.  
 Clearing off one excrescence to see two, 740  
 There's ever a next in size, now grown as big,  
 That meets the knife: I cut and cut again!  
 First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last  
 But Fichte's clever cut at God himself?  
 Experimentalize on sacred things! 745  
 I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain  
 To stop betimes: they all get drunk alike.  
 The first step, I am master not to take.

You'd find the cutting-process to your taste  
 As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned, 750  
 Nor see more danger in it,—you retort.  
 Your taste's worth mine; but my taste proves more wise  
 When we consider that the steadfast hold  
 On the extreme end of the chain of faith  
 Gives all the advantage, makes the difference 755  
 With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule:  
 We are their lords, or they are free of us,  
 Just as we tighten or relax our hold.  
 So, other matters equal, we'll revert  
 To the first problem—which, if solved my way 760  
 And thrown into the balance, turns the scale—  
 How we may lead a comfortable life,  
 How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time  
 How narrowly and grossly I view life, 765

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732. *Decrassify*: make less crass.

744. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1765–1814), German philosopher, defined God as “the moral order of the universe.” Compare Matthew Arnold's later definition of God as a natural law, “the not-ourselves that makes for righteousness.”

Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule  
 The masses, and regard complacently  
 "The cabin," in our old phrase. Well, I do.  
 I act for, talk for, live for this world now,  
 As this world prizes action, life and talk: 770  
 No prejudice to what next world may prove,  
 Whose new laws and requirements, my best pledge  
 To observe then, is that I observe these now,  
 Shall do hereafter what I do meanwhile.  
 Let us concede (gratuitously though) 775  
 Next life relieves the soul of body, yields  
 Pure spiritual enjoyment: well, my friend,  
 Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use  
 May be to make the next life more intense?

Do you know, I have often had a dream 780  
 (Work it up in your next month's article)  
 Of man's poor spirit in its progress, still  
 Losing true life for ever and a day  
 Through ever trying to be and ever being—  
 In the evolution of successive spheres— 785  
*Before* its actual sphere and place of life,  
 Halfway into the next, which having reached,  
 It shoots with corresponding foolery  
 Halfway into the next still, on and off!  
 As when a traveller, bound from North to South, 790  
 Scouts fur in Russia: what's its use in France?  
 In France spurns flannel: where's its need in Spain?  
 In Spain drops cloth, too cumbrous for Algiers!  
 Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,  
 A superfluity at Timbuctoo. 795  
 When, through his journey, was the fool at ease?  
 I'm at ease now, friend; worldly in this world,  
 I take and like its way of life; I think  
 My brothers, who administer the means,  
 Live better for my comfort—that's good too; 800  
 And God, if he pronounce upon such life,  
 Approves my service, which is better still.

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769 ff. Cf. Browning's own attitude, in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 67-72, and his interests, tastes, and emphasis shown in the rest of the poetry in this volume.

If he keep silence,—why, for you or me  
 Or that brute beast pulled-up in to-day's "Times,"  
 What odds is't, save to ourselves, what life we lead? 805

You meet me at this issue: you declare,—  
 All special-pleading done with—truth is truth,  
 And justifies itself by undreamed ways.  
 You don't fear but it's better, if we doubt,  
 To say so, act up to our truth perceived 810  
 However feebly. Do then,—act away!  
 'T is there I'm on the watch for you. How one acts  
 Is, both of us agree, our chief concern:  
 And how you'll act is what I fain would see  
 If, like the candid person you appear, 815  
 You dare to make the most of your life's scheme  
 As I of mine, live up to its full law  
 Since there's no higher law that counterchecks.  
 Put natural religion to the test  
 You've just demolished the revealed with—quick, 820  
 Down to the root of all that checks your will,  
 All prohibition to lie, kill and thief,  
 Or even to be an atheistic priest!  
 Suppose a pricking to incontinence—  
 Philosophers deduce you chastity 825  
 Or shame, from just the fact that at the first  
 Whoso embraced a woman in the field,  
 Threw club down and forewent his brains beside,  
 So, stood a ready victim in the reach  
 Of any brother savage, club in hand; 830  
 Hence saw the use of going out of sight  
 In wood or cave to prosecute his loves:  
 I read this in a French book t'other day.  
 Does law so analyzed coerce you much?  
 Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end, 835  
 But you who reach where the first thread begins,  
 You'll soon cut that!—which means you can, but won't,  
 Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,  
 You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,  
 But there they are, and so you let them rule. 840  
 Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,  
 A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,

Without the good the slave expects to get,  
 In case he has a master after all!  
 You own your instincts? why, what else do I, 845  
 Who want, am made for, and must have a God  
 Ere I can be aught, do aught?—no mere name  
 Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,  
 To wit, a relation from that thing to me,  
 Touching from head to foot—which touch I feel, 850  
 And with it take the rest, this life of ours!  
 I live my life here; yours you dare not live.

—Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)  
 Disfigure such a life and call it names,  
 While, to your mind, remains another way 855  
 For simple men: knowledge and power have rights,  
 But ignorance and weakness have rights too.  
 There needs no crucial effort to find truth  
 If here or there or anywhere about:  
 We ought to turn each side, try hard and see, 860  
 And if we can't, be glad we've earned at least  
 The right, by one laborious proof the more,  
 To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.  
 Men are not angels, neither are they brutes:  
 Something we may see, all we cannot see. 865  
 What need of lying? I say, I see all,  
 And swear to each detail the most minute  
 In what I think a Pan's face—you, mere cloud:  
 I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,  
 For fear, if once I drop the emphasis, 870  
 Mankind may doubt there's any cloud at all.  
 You take the simple life—ready to see,  
 Willing to see (for no cloud's worth a face)—  
 And leaving quiet what no strength can move,  
 And which, who bids you move? who has the right? 875  
 I bid you; but you are God's sheep, not mine:  
*"Pastor est tui Dominus."* You find  
 In this the pleasant pasture of our life  
 Much you may eat without the least offence,

864-5. Cf. the description of Man, put into the mouth of St. John in  
 "A Death in the Desert" (576-80 and 586-88).

877. *Pastor est tui Dominus*: The Lord is your shepherd.

Much you don't eat because your maw objects, 880  
 Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock  
 Open great eyes at you and even butt,  
 And thereupon you like your mates so well  
 You cannot please yourself, offending them;  
 Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep, 885  
 You weigh your pleasure with their butts and bleats  
 And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears  
 Restrain you, real checks since you find them so;  
 Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks:  
 And thus you graze through life with not one lie, 890  
 And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name?  
 If so, you beat—which means you are not I—  
 Who needs must make earth mine and feed my fill  
 Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,  
 But motioned to the velvet of the sward 895  
 By those obsequious wethers' very selves.  
 Look at me, sir; my age is double yours:  
 At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,  
 What now I should be—as, permit the word,  
 I pretty well imagine your whole range 900  
 And stretch of tether twenty years to come.  
 We both have minds and bodies much alike:  
 In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,  
 My daily bread, my influence, and my state?  
 You're young. I'm old; you must be old one day; 905  
 Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,  
 Women their lovers kneel to, who cut curls  
 From your fat lap-dog's ear to grace a brooch—  
 Dukes, who petition just to kiss your ring—  
 With much beside you know or may conceive? 910  
 Suppose we die to-night: well, here am I,  
 Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,  
 While writing all the same my articles  
 On music, poetry, the fictile vase  
 Found at Albano, chess, Anacreon's Greek. 915  
 But you—the highest honour in your life,  
 The thing you'll crown yourself with, all your days,

Is—dining here and drinking this last glass  
 I pour you out in sign of amity  
 Before we part for ever. Of your power 920  
 And social influence, worldly worth in short,  
 Judge what's my estimation by the fact,  
 I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,  
 Hint secrecy on one of all these words!  
 You're shrewd and know that should you publish one 925  
 The world would brand the lie—my enemies first,  
 Who'd sneer—"the bishop's an arch-hypocrite  
 And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool."  
 Whereas I should not dare for both my ears  
 Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile, 930  
 Before the chaplain who reflects myself—  
 My shade's so much more potent than your flesh.  
 What's your reward, self-abnegating friend?  
 Stood you confessed of those exceptional  
 And privileged great natures that dwarf mine— 935  
 A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,  
 A poet just about to print his ode,  
 A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,  
 An artist whose religion is his art—  
 I should have nothing to object: such men 940  
 Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,  
 Their drugget's worth my purple, they beat me.  
 But you,—you're just as little those as I—  
 You, Gigadibs, who, thirty years of age,  
 Write stately for Blackwood's Magazine, 945  
 Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul  
 Unseized by the Germans yet—which view you'll print—  
 Meantime the best you have to show being still  
 That lively lightsome article we took  
 Almost for the true Dickens,—what's its name? 950  
 "The Slum and Cellar, or Whitechapel life  
 Limned after dark!" it made me laugh, I know,  
 And pleased a month, and brought you in ten pounds.  
 —Success I recognize and compliment,  
 And therefore give you, if you choose, three words 955  
 (The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)

945. *Blackwood's Magazine*: one of the leading literary periodicals in Victorian England.

Which whether here, in Dublin or New York,  
 Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,  
 Such terms as never you aspired to get  
 In all our own reviews and some not ours. 960  
 Go write your lively sketches! be the first  
 "Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence"—  
 Or better simply say, "The Outward-bound."  
 Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth  
 As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad 965  
 About me on the church-door opposite.  
 You will not wait for that experience though,  
 I fancy, howsoever you decide,  
 To discontinue—not detesting, not  
 Defaming, but at least—despising me! 970

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Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour  
 Sylvester Blougram, styled *in partibus*  
*Episcopus, nec non*—(the deuce knows what  
 It's changed to by our novel hierarchy)  
 With Gigadibs the literary man, 975  
 Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,  
 And ranged the olive-stones about its edge,  
 While the great bishop rolled him out a mind  
 Long crumpled, till creased consciousness lay smooth.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke. 980  
 The other portion, as he shaped it thus  
 For argumentatory purposes,  
 He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.  
 Some arbitrary accidental thoughts  
 That crossed his mind, amusing because new, 985

---

972-4. When the Roman Catholic Church was not regularly established in England it had no bishops of English sees; bishops serving "*in partibus infidelium*"—in London, for example—bore titles from foreign lands. But in 1850, to the great horror of the English Protestants, of Parliament, Oxford, and Cambridge, the Pope reëstablished the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England, Wiseman's title being changed to "Archbishop of Westminster."

980-87. Browning too believed, say, half of what is spoken here; he has added perhaps arbitrary thoughts that crossed his mind, amusing because new.



He chose to represent as fixtures there,  
 Invariable convictions (such they seemed  
 Beside his interlocutor's loose cards  
 Flung daily down, and not the same way twice)  
 While certain hell-deep instincts, man's weak tongue 990  
 Is never bold to utter in their truth  
 Because styled hell-deep ('t is an old mistake  
 To place hell at the bottom of the earth)  
 He ignored these,—not having in readiness  
 Their nomenclature and philosophy: 995  
 He said true things, but called them by wrong names.  
 "On the whole," he thought, "I justify myself  
 On every point where cavillers like this  
 Oppugn my life: he tries one kind of fence,  
 I close, he's worsted, that's enough for him. 1000  
 He's on the ground: if ground should break away  
 I take my stand on, there's a firmer yet  
 Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.  
 His ground was over mine and broke the first:  
 So, let him sit with me this many a year!" 1005

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week  
 Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.  
 Something had struck him in the "Outward-bound"  
 Another way than Blougram's purpose was:  
 And having bought, not cabin-furniture 1010  
 But settler's-implements (enough for three)  
 And started for Australia—there, I hope,  
 By this time he has tested his first plough,  
 And studied his last chapter of St. John.

## MEMORABILIA\*

## I

АН, did you once see Shelley plain,  
 And did he stop and speak to you  
 And did you speak to him again?  
 How strange it seems and new!

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\* Browning in his youth was a great admirer of Shelley, whom he addressed as "Sun-treader" in *Pauline* (1833), written under Shelley's influence. He also wrote a critical essay on Shelley in 1852 (introductory to a

## II

But you were living before that, 5  
 And also you are living after;  
 And the memory I started at—  
 My starting moves your laughter.

## III

I crossed a moor, with a name of its own  
 And a certain use in the world no doubt, 10  
 Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone  
 'Mid the blank miles round about:

## IV

For there I picked up on the heather  
 And there I put inside my breast  
 A moulted feather, an eagle-feather! 15  
 Well, I forget the rest.

## ANDREA DEL SARTO\*

(CALLED "THE FAULTLESS PAINTER")

BUT do not let us quarrel any more,  
 No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:  
 Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.  
 You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?  
 I 'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear, 5

volume of letters later found to be spurious). He told W. G. Kingsland that one day in a bookseller's shop he met a stranger who happened to mention talking with Shelley. "Suddenly the stranger paused, and burst into laughter as he observed me staring at him with blanched face. . . . I still vividly remember how strangely the presence of a man who had seen and spoken with Shelley affected me" (*Contemporary Review*, CII, 206-7). *Memorabilia* means "things worth remembering." This poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855).

9. *Moor*: symbol of a commonplace life.

\* John Kenyon, the friend who introduced Browning to Elizabeth Barrett, wanted a photograph of Andrea's portrait of himself and his wife, in the Pitti Palace at Florence. Not being able to procure a photograph, Browning wrote this poem and sent it to him instead. It is perhaps Browning's greatest poem, as the poet himself realized by the time he wrote "One Word More," the epilogue that concluded, as this poem began, the second volume of *Men and Women* (1855). Evening in Florence, the autumn of life, regret without contrition, technical perfection without grandeur, failure,

Treat his own subject after his own way,  
 Fix his own time, accept too his own price,  
 And shut the money into this small hand  
 When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?  
 Oh, I 'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love! 10  
 I often am much wearier than you think,  
 This evening more than usual, and it seems  
 As if—forgive now—should you let me sit  
 Here by the window with your hand in mine  
 And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole, 15  
 Both of one mind, as married people use,  
 Quietly, quietly the evening through,  
 I might get up to-morrow to my work  
 Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.  
 To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this! 20  
 Your soft hand is a woman of itself,  
 And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.  
 Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve  
 For each of the five pictures we require:  
 It saves a model. So! keep looking so— 25  
My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!  
 —How could you ever prick those perfect ears,  
 Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet—  
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon, —→ (c'd) 5 4 4 4  
 Which everybody looks on and calls his, 30

even the silver-grey music of the verse, all these are fused into a perfectly harmonious symphony in a minor key.

Andrea (called *del Sarto* because his father was a tailor) was a Florentine painter (1486-1531). The title he won, "Il Pittore senza Errori," "The Faultless Painter," evidently incited Browning to bring out his own belief that only men of low ambition can achieve perfection. (Cf. "Old Pictures in Florence.")

2. *Lucrezia*: his wife, Lucrezi di Baccio del Fede, a cap-maker's widow. Vasari, who would have first hand information since he had been Andrea's pupil, describes her (in the first edition of his *Lives of the Painters*) as a haughty siren who ensnared Andrea before her husband's death. He degraded himself by marrying her, and thus lost the respect of his friends. He soon became jealous of her, probably with good reason, for she deserted him during his last illness. Her expression in the picture that Andrea is painting as he speaks betrays a woman without depth of feeling.

15. *Fiesole*: a town on the hills near Florence. The Brownings had resided in Florence since April, 1847.

26. *Serpentine*: sinuous, undulant.

And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,  
 While she looks—no one's, very dear, no less.  
 Your smile? why, there's my picture ready made,  
 There's what we painters call our harmony!  
 A common greyness silvers everything,— 35  
 All in a twilight, you and I alike  
 —You, at the point of your first pride in me  
 (That's gone you know),—but I, at every point;  
 My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down  
 To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole. 40  
 There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;  
 That length of convent-wall across the way  
 Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;  
 The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,  
 And autumn grows, autumn in everything. 45  
 Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape  
 As if I saw alike my work and self  
 And all that I was born to be and do,  
 A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.  
 How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead; 50  
 So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!  
 I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!  
 This chamber for example—turn your head—  
 All that's behind us! You don't understand  
 Nor care to understand about my art, 55  
 But you can hear at least when people speak:  
 And that cartoon, the second from the door  
 —It is the thing, Love! so such things should be—  
 Behold Madonna!—I am bold to say.  
 I can do with my pencil what I know, 60  
 What I see, what at bottom of my heart  
 I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—  
 Do easily, too—when I say, perfectly,  
 I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,  
 Who listened to the Legate's talk last week, 65  
 And just as much they used to say in France.  
 At any rate 't is easy, all of it!  
 No sketches first, no studies, that's long past:  
 I do what many dream of, all their lives,

57. *Cartoon*: drawing for a painting.

65. *Legate*: Pope's envoy.

—Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do, 70  
 And fail in doing. I could count twenty such  
 On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,  
 Who strive—you don't know how the others strive  
 To paint a little thing like that you smeared  
 Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,— 75  
 Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,  
 (I know his name, no matter)—so much less!  
 Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.  
 There burns a truer light of God in them,  
 In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain, 80  
 Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt  
 This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.  
 Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,  
 Reach many a time a heaven that 's shut to me,  
 Enter and take their place there sure enough, 85  
 Though they come back and cannot tell the world.  
 My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.  
 The sudden blood of these men! at a word—  
 Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.  
 I, painting from myself and to myself, 90  
 Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame  
 Or their praise either. Somebody remarks  
 Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,  
 His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,  
 Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that? 95  
 Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?  
 Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,

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76. *Someone*: Michelangelo. See lines 189–193.

82. Elie Faure (*Renaissance Art*, tr. Pach, New York, 1937, p. 78) with reference to Andrea del Sarto, speaks of such "an intelligence that has mistaken its rôle through allowing sentiment to be effaced; it is an intelligence that takes means for the end and exhausts itself in seeking the form outside of the inner drama that determines its function." Cf. Vasari, *Lives of Seventy of the Most Eminent Painters*, ed. and tr. by Blashfield and Hopkins, New York, 1896, III, 234 ff., especially, "there was a certain timidity of mind, a sort of diffidence and want of force in his nature, which rendered it impossible that those evidences of ardour and animation, which are proper to the more exalted character, should ever appear in him," so that he lacked the grandeur and force of other great masters and never became a "truly divine painter."

93. *Morello*: a mountain north of Florence.

Or what 's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,  
 Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!  
 I know both what I want and what might gain, 100  
 And yet how profitless to know, to sigh  
 "Had I been two, another and myself,  
 Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt.  
 Yonder 's a work now, of that famous youth  
 The Urbinate who died five years ago. 105  
 ('T is copied, George Vasari sent it me.)  
 Well, I can fancy how he did it all,  
 Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,  
 Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,  
 Above and through his art—for it gives way; 110  
 That arm is wrongly put—and there again—  
 A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,  
 Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,  
 He means right—that, a child may understand.  
 Still, what an arm! and I could alter it: 115  
 But all the play, the insight and the stretch—  
 Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?  
 Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,  
 We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!  
 Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think— 120  
 More than I merit, yes, by many times.

97-8. Even Andrea, the complete opposite of Browning and the kind of man he considers most contemptible (worse than an energetic criminal) is forced to become the spokesman of Browning's own peculiar doctrine, expressed also in "Old Pictures in Florence," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," "A Grammarian's Funeral," "Saul," etc. This "philosophy of the imperfect" is also defended in Ruskin's "On the Nature of Gothic," in *Stones of Venice*, II, vi. Elizabeth Barrett wrote to Browning on February 24, 1846, "One's ideal must be above one. . . . It is as far as one can reach with one's eyes (soul-eyes), not reach to touch" (*Letters*, I, 501). Browning has rephrased her statement, but it is still recognizable. He has made it peculiarly his own by what he adds about Heaven. (Cf "Evelyn Hope," "Epilogue to *Asolando*," etc.) Contrast the Christian-Platonic conception of the eternal life as not merely an extension in time "for" the continuation of impossible worldly pursuits, but a rebirth into a new spiritual attitude different in kind, and free from the urges of ambition.

105. *Urbinate*: Raphael (1483-1520), born at Urbino, one of the greatest Italian painters.

106. *Vasari*: pupil of Andrea and author of *The Lives of the Painters* from which Browning got the material for this poem and for "Fra Lippo Lippi."

But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,  
 And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,  
 And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird SIMILE  
 The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare— 125  
 Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!  
 Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged  
 "God and the glory! never care for gain.  
 The present by the future, what is that?  
 Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo! 130  
 Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!"  
 I might have done it for you. So it seems:  
 Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.  
 Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;  
 The rest avail not. Why do I need you? 135  
 What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?  
 In this world, who can do a thing, will not;  
 And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:  
 Yet the will 's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—  
 And thus we half-men struggle. At the end, 140  
 God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.  
 'T is safer for me, if the award be strict,  
 That I am something underrated here,  
 Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.  
 I dared not, do you know, leave home all day, 145  
 For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.  
 The best is when they pass and look aside;  
 But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.  
 Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,  
 And that long festal year at Fontainebleau! 150  
 I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,  
 Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,  
 In that humane great monarch's golden look,—  
 One finger in his beard or twisted curl

126. Just before their marriage, Browning mentioned to Elizabeth Barrett that his happiness would be disturbed if he were to ally himself with a woman whose mind he could not look up to (*Letters*, II, 425).

130. *Agnolo*: Michelangelo (1475–1564).

146–150. King Francis I (1494–1547), patron of Italian artists who could bring Renaissance culture to France, had given Andrea encouragement at his royal palace in Fontainebleau. Returning to Florence to buy paintings for the King, Andrea used the money to settle down there with Lucrezia.

Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile, 155  
 One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,  
 The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,  
 I painting proudly with his breath on me,  
 All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,  
 Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls 160  
 Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—  
 And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,  
 This in the background, waiting on my work,  
 To crown the issue with a last reward! 165  
 A good time, was it not, my kingly days?  
 And had you not grown restless . . . but I know—  
 'T is done and past; 't was right, my instinct said;  
 Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,  
 And I 'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt  
 Out of the grange whose four walls make his world. 170  
 How could it end in any other way?  
 You called me, and I came home to your heart.  
 The triumph was—to reach and stay there; since  
 I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?  
 Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold, 175  
 You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!  
 "Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;  
 The Roman's is the better when you pray,  
 But still the other's Virgin was his wife—"  
 Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge 180  
 Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows  
 My better fortune, I resolve to think.  
 For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,  
 Said one day Agnolo, his very self,  
 To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . . 185  
 (When the young man was flaming out his thoughts  
 Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,  
 Too lifted up in heart because of it)  
 "Friend, there 's a certain sorry little scrub  
 Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how, 190  
 Who, were he set to plan and execute

---

178. *The Roman*: Raphael.

189 ff. Vasari reports that Michelangelo said to Raphael, "There is a little man in Florence, who if he were employed upon such great works as have been given to you, would make you sweat" (III, 196).



As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,  
 Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"  
 To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.  
 I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see, 195  
 Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line should go!  
 Ay, but the soul! he 's Rafael! rub it out!  
 Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,  
 (What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?  
 Do you forget already words like those?) 200  
 If really there was such a chance, so lost,—  
 Is, whether you 're—not grateful—but more pleased.  
 Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!  
 This hour has been an hour! Another smile?  
 If you would sit thus by me every night 205  
 I should work better, do you comprehend?  
 I mean that I should earn more, give you more.  
 See, it is settled dusk now; there 's a star;  
 Morello 's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,  
 The cue-owls speak the name we call them by. 210  
 Come from the window, love,—come in, at last,  
 Inside the melancholy little house  
 We built to be so gay with. God is just.  
King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights  
 When I look up from painting, eyes tired out, 215  
 The walls become illumined, brick from brick  
 Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,  
 That gold of his I did cement them with!  
 Let us but love each other. Must you go?  
 That Cousin here again? he waits outside? 220  
 Must see you—you, and not with me? Those loans?  
 More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?  
 Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?  
 While hand and eye and something of a heart  
 Are left me, work 's my ware, and what 's it worth? 225  
 I 'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit  
 The grey remainder of the evening out,  
 Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly  
How I could paint, were I but back in France,  
One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face, 230

216-8. Andrea built himself a house with the gold King Francis had entrusted to him.

Not yours this time! I want you at my side  
 To hear them—that is, Michel Agnolo—  
 Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.  
 Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.  
 I take the subjects for his corridor, 235  
 Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,  
 And throw him in another thing or two  
 If he demurs; the whole should prove enough  
 To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,  
 What 's better and what 's all I care about, 240  
 Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!  
 Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,  
The Cousin! what does he to please you more? :

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.  
 I regret little, I would change still less. 245  
 Since there my past life lies, why alter it?  
 The very wrong to Francis!—it is true  
 I took his coin, was tempted and complied,  
 And built this house and sinned, and all is said.  
 My father and my mother died of want. 250  
 Well, had I riches of my own? you see  
 How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.  
 They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:  
 And I have laboured somewhat in my time  
 And not been paid profusely. Some good son 255  
 Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try!  
 No doubt, there 's something strikes a balance. Yes,  
 You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.  
 This must suffice me here. What would one have?  
 In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance— 260  
 Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,  
 Meted on each side by the angel's reed,  
 For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me  
 To cover—the three first without a wife,

---

241. *Scudi*: coins approximately equal to dollars.

250. Vasari says Andrea abandoned his father and mother and took care of his wife's relatives instead.

261. *New Jerusalem*: Heaven. See Revelation, xxi, 10–21.

263. *Leonard*: Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), one of the three greatest painters of the Italian Renaissance.

While I have mine! So—still they overcome 265  
Because there 's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

## BEFORE\*

## I

LET them fight it out, friend! things have gone too far.  
God must judge the couple: leave them as they are  
—Whichever one 's the guiltless, to his glory,  
And whichever one the guilt 's with, to my story!

## II

Why, you would not bid men, sunk in such a slough, 5  
Strike no arm out further, stick and stink as now,  
Leaving right and wrong to settle the embroilment,  
Heaven with snaky hell, in torture and entoilment?

## III

Who 's the culprit of them? How must he conceive  
God—the queen he caps to, laughing in his sleeve, 10  
“’T is but decent to profess oneself beneath her:  
Still, one must not be too much in earnest, either!”

## IV

Better sin the whole sin, sure that God observes;  
Then go live his life out! Life will try his nerves,  
When the sky, which noticed all, makes no disclosure, 15  
And the earth keeps up her terrible composure.

## V

Let him pace at pleasure, past the walls of rose,  
Pluck their fruits when grape-trees graze him as he goes!  
For he 'gins to guess the purpose of the garden,  
With the sly mute thing, beside there, for a warden. 20

\* “Before” and “After” are companion pieces, published in *Men and Women* (1855). In “Before” the speaker is a second for one of the duelists. In a letter to Elizabeth Barrett, April 8, 1846, Browning defended dueling as something any man must do who, unlike himself, cared to have a position in society. She attacked his argument in her next letter.

## VI

What 's the leopard-dog-thing, constant at his side,  
 A leer and lie in every eye of its obsequious hide?  
 When will come an end to all the mock obeisance,  
 And the price appear that pays for the misfeasance?

## VII

So much for the culprit. Who 's the martyred man? 25  
 Let him bear one stroke more, for be sure he can!  
 He that strove thus evil's lump with good to leaven,  
 Let him give his blood at last and get his heaven!

## VIII

All or nothing, stake it! Trusts he God or no?  
 Thus far and no farther? farther? be it so! 30  
 Now, enough of your chicane of prudent pauses.  
 Sage provisos, sub-intents and saving-clauses!

## IX

Ah, "forgive" you bid him? While God's champion lives,  
 Wrong shall be resisted: dead, why, he forgives.  
 But you must not end my friend ere you begin him; 35  
 Evil stands not crowned on earth, while breath is in him.

## X

Once more—Will the wronger, at this last of all,  
 Dare to say, "I did wrong," rising in his fall?  
 No?—Let go, then! Both the fighters to their places!  
 While I count three, step you back as many paces! 40

## AFTER\*

TAKE the cloak from his face, and at first  
 Let the corpse do its worst!

29. Notice how close this view is to other expressions of optimism in Browning's poetry. The poet here suggests that the duel is a continuation of the Medieval trial by combat, such as he portrays it in "Count Gismond."

\*The speaker is the victor. (See note to the companion piece, "Before.")

## IN THREE DAYS

How he lies in his rights of a man!  
 Death has done all death can.  
 And, absorbed in the new life he leads, 5  
 He recks not, he heeds  
 Nor his wrong nor my vengeance; both strike  
 On his senses alike,  
 And are lost in the solemn and strange  
 Surprise of the change. 10

Ha, what avails death to erase  
 His offence, my disgrace?  
 I would we were boys as of old  
 In the field, by the fold:  
 His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn 15  
 Were so easily borne!

I stand here now, he lies in his place:  
 Cover the face!

## IN THREE DAYS\*

## I

So, I shall see her in three days  
 And just one night, but nights are short,  
 Then two long hours, and that is morn.  
 See how I come, unchanged, unworn!  
 Feel, where my life broke off from thine, 5  
 How fresh the splinters keep and fine,—  
 Only a touch and we combine!

## II

Too long, this time of year, the days!  
 But nights, at least the nights are short.  
 As night shows where her one moon is, 10  
 A hand's-breadth of pure light and bliss,  
 So life's night gives my lady birth  
 And my eyes hold her! What is worth  
 The rest of heaven, the rest of earth?

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\* This and "In a Year" are companion pieces, published together in *Men and Women* (1855). In the first a man is speaking; in the second, a woman. As in "A Woman's Last Word" and "Any Wife to Any Husband," Browning is differentiating between love in men and women.

## III

O loaded curls, release your store 15  
 Of warmth and scent, as once before  
 The tingling hair did, lights and darks  
 Outbreaking into fairy sparks,  
 When under curl and curl I pried  
 After the warmth and scent inside, 20  
 Thro' lights and darks how manifold—  
 The dark inspired, the light controlled!  
 As early Art embrowns the gold.

## IV

What great fear, should one say, "Three days  
 That change the world might change as well 25  
 Your fortune; and if joy delays,  
 Be happy that no worse befell!"  
 What small fear, if another says,  
 "Three days and one short night beside  
 May throw no shadow on your ways; 30  
 But years must teem with change untried,  
 With chance not easily defied,  
 With an end somewhere undescried."  
 No fear!—or if a fear be born  
 This minute, it dies out in scorn. 35  
 Fear? I shall see her in three days  
 And one night, now the nights are short,  
 Then just two hours, and that is morn.

## IN A YEAR\*

## I

NEVER any more,  
 While I live,  
 Need I hope to see his face  
 As before.  
 Once his love grown chill, 5  
 Mine may strive:  
 Bitterly we re-embrace,  
 Single still.

\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). See note under the companion piece, "In Three Days."

## II

Was it something said,  
 Something done, 10  
 Vexed him? was it touch of hand,  
 Turn of head?  
 Strange! that very way  
 Love begun:  
 I as little understand 15  
 Love's decay.

## III

When I sewed or drew,  
 I recall  
 How he looked as if I sung,  
 —Sweetly too. 20  
 If I spoke a word,  
 First of all  
 Up his cheek the colour sprung,  
 Then he heard.

## IV

Sitting by my side, 25  
 At my feet,  
 So he breathed but air I breathed,  
 Satisfied!  
 I, too, at love's brim  
 Touched the sweet: 30  
 I would die if death bequeathed  
 Sweet to him.

## V

"Speak, I love thee best!"  
 He exclaimed:  
 "Let thy love my own foretell!" 35  
 I confessed:  
 "Clasp my heart on thine  
 Now unblamed,  
 Since upon thy soul as well  
 Hangeth mine!" 40

## VI

Was it wrong to own,  
Being truth?  
Why should all the giving prove  
His alone?  
I had wealth and ease, 45  
Beauty, youth:  
Since my lover gave me love,  
I gave these.

## VII

That was all I meant,  
—To be just, 50  
And the passion I had raised,  
To content.  
Since he chose to change  
Gold for dust,  
If I gave him what he praised 55  
Was it strange?

## VIII

Would he loved me yet,  
On and on,  
While I found some way undreamed  
—Paid my debt! 60  
Gave more life and more,  
Till, all gone,  
He should smile "She never seemed  
Mine before.

## IX

"What, she felt the while, 65  
Must I think?  
Love 's so different with us men!"  
He should smile:  
"Dying for my sake—  
White and pink! 70  
Can't we touch these bubbles then  
But they break?"



## X

Dear, the pang is brief,  
 Do thy part,  
 Have thy pleasure! How perplexed 75  
 Grows belief!  
 Well, this cold clay clod  
 Was man's heart:  
 Crumble it, and what comes next?  
 Is it God? 80

## OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE\*

## I

THE morn when first it thunders in March,  
 The eel in the pond gives a leap, they say:  
 As I leaned and looked over the aloed arch  
 Of the villa-gate this warm March day,  
 No flash snapped, no dumb thunder rolled 5  
 In the valley beneath where, white and wide  
 And washed by the morning water-gold,  
 Florence lay out on the mountain-side.

## II

River and bridge and street and square  
 Lay mine, as much at my beck and call, 10  
 Through the live translucent bath of air,  
 As the sights in a magic crystal ball.

\* This expresses a love for the early Florentine art from which Fra Lippo Lippi broke away. The views of art expressed in the two poems may be contrasted. But Browning, opponent of Classicism, is especially contrasting the perfection of Greek art with the imperfection of Medieval art which leaves room for aspiration, and tries to paint the soul. He agreed with Ruskin's statement in "The Nature of Gothic" (*Stones of Venice*, II, vi, II, Cooke and Wedderburn, ed., vol. X, 191) that while "we are to desire perfection, and strive for it, we are nevertheless not to set the meaner thing, in its narrow accomplishment, above the nobler thing, in its mighty progress . . . not to lower the level of our aim, that we may the more surely enjoy the complacency of success." Browning's belief in Progress, even in Art, is stated very explicitly in his "Parleying with Gerard de Lairese."

Browning and his wife had lived in Florence since their marriage, had visited the galleries, read Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*, and picked up pictures in obscure corners of the city. Mrs. Browning wrote to Mrs. Jameson, May 4, 1850, that Robert had just acquired five pictures and that one of the

And of all I saw and of all I praised,  
 The most to praise and the best to see  
 Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised: 15  
 But why did it more than startle me?

III

Giotto, how, with that soul of yours,  
 Could you play me false who loved you so?  
 Some slights if a certain heart endures  
 Yet it feels, I would have your fellows know! 20  
 I' faith, I perceive not why I should care  
 To break a silence that suits them best,  
 But the thing grows somewhat hard to bear  
 When I find a Giotto join the rest.

IV

On the arch where olives overhead 25  
 Print the blue sky with twig and leaf,  
 (That sharp-curved leaf which they never shed)  
 'Twixt the aloes, I used to lean in chief,  
 And mark through the winter afternoons,  
 By a gift God grants me now and then, 30  
 In the mild decline of those suns like moons,  
 Who walked in Florence, besides her men.

V

They might chirp and chaffer, come and go  
 For pleasure or profit, her men alive—  
 My business was hardly with them, I trow, 35  
 But with empty cells of the human hive;  
 —With the chapter-room, the cloister-porch,  
 The church's apsis, aisle or nave,  
 Its crypt, one fingers along with a torch,  
 Its face set full for the sun to shave. 40

best judges in Florence "throws out such names for them as Cimabue, Ghirlandajo, Giotto, a crucifixion painted on a banner, Giottoesque, if not Giotto. . . ." The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855).

15. *Bell-tower*: the campanile of the Cathedral Santa Maria in Florence, designed by Giotto (1276-1337), greatest artist and architect of Medieval Florence. He died before the campanile was completed.

## VI

Wherever a fresco peels and drops,  
 Wherever an outline weakens and wanes  
 Till the latest life in the painting stops,  
 Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains:  
 One, wishful each scrap should clutch the brick, 45  
 Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,  
 —A lion who dies of an ass's kick,  
 The wronged great soul of an ancient Master.

## VII

For oh, this world and the wrong it does!  
 They are safe in heaven with their backs to it, 50  
 The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz  
 Round the works of, you of the little wit!  
 Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,  
 Now that they see God face to face,  
 And have all attained to be poets, I hope? 55  
 'T is their holiday now, in any case.

## VIII

Much they reckon of your praise and you!  
 But the wronged great souls—can they be quit  
 Of a world where their work is all to do,  
 Where you style them, you of the little wit, 60  
 Old Master This and Early the Other,  
 Not dreaming that Old and New are fellows:  
 A younger succeeds to an elder brother,  
 Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.

## IX

And here where your praise might yield returns, 65  
 And a handsome word or two give help,  
 Here, after your kind, the mastiff grins  
 And the puppy pack of poodles yelp.

44. *One*: the spirit of the painter whose picture is neglected.

51. Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Raphael (1483-1520), two of the greatest artists of the Renaissance. See "Andrea del Sarto."

64. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) represents Renaissance genius at its height. Dello di Niccolo Delli, a fifteenth-century painter, is obscure and relatively unimportant. Notice how Browning is carrying democratic attitudes into the discussion of art.

67. *Grins*: snarls.

What, not a word for Stefano there,  
Of brow once prominent and starry,  
Called Nature's Ape and the world's despair 70  
For his peerless painting? (See Vasari.)

X

There stands the Master. Study, my friends,  
What a man's work comes to! So he plans it,  
Performs it, perfects it, makes amends 75  
For the toiling and moiling, and then, *sic transit!*  
Happier the thrifty blind-folk labour,  
With upturned eye while the hand is busy,  
Not sidling a glance at the coin of their neighbour!  
'T is looking downward that makes one dizzy. 80

XI

"If you knew their work you would deal your dole."  
May I take upon me to instruct you?  
When Greek Art ran and reached the goal,  
Thus much had the world to boast *in fructu*—  
The Truth of Man, as by God first spoken, 85  
Which the actual generations garble,  
Was re-uttered, and Soul (which Limbs betoken)  
And Limbs (Soul informs) made new in marble.

XII

So, you saw yourself as you wished you were,  
As you might have been, as you cannot be; 90  
Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there:  
And grew content in your poor degree  
With your little power, by those statues' godhead,  
And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,  
And your little grace, by their grace embodied, 95  
And your little date, by their forms that stay.

69. *Stefano*: a pupil of Giotto's, called "The Ape of Nature" for his ability to imitate nature.

72. *Vasari*: author of *The Lives of the Painters*. He says "It is obvious Stefano approached closely to the manner of the moderns, surpassing his master Giotto considerably, whether in design or other artistic qualities."

76. *Sic transit*: add *gloria mundi* ("thus passes the glory of the world").

84. *In fructu*: "as fruit."

## XIII

You would fain be kinglier, say, than I am?  
 Even so, you will not sit like Theseus.  
 You would prove a model? The Son of Priam  
 Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees' use. 100  
 You 're wroth—can you slay your snake like Apollo?  
 You 're grieved—still Niobe 's the grander!  
 You live—there 's the Racers' frieze to follow:  
 You die—there 's the dying Alexander.

## XIV

So, testing your weakness by their strength, 105  
 Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,  
 Measured by Art in your breadth and length,  
 You learned—to submit is a mortal's duty.  
 —When I say "you" 't is the common soul,  
 The collective, I mean: the race of Man 110  
 That receives life in parts to live in a whole,  
 And grow here according to God's clear plan.

## XV

Growth came when, looking your last on them all,  
 You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day  
 And cried with a start—What if we so small 115  
 Be greater and grander the while than they?  
 Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature?  
 In both, of such lower types are we  
 Precisely because of our wider nature;  
 For time, theirs—ours, for eternity. 120

## XVI

To-day's brief passion limits their range;  
 It seethes with the morrow for us and more.  
 They are perfect—how else? they shall never change:  
 We are faulty—why not? we have time in store.

98. A reference to the statue of Theseus from the frieze of the Parthenon.

99. *Son of Priam*: Paris, of the Aegina sculptures, kneeling and drawing a bow.

102. The statue of Niobe mourning for her children was in the Uffizi Gallery at Florence, as was also a statue of the dying Alexander.

103. *Racers' frieze*: on the Parthenon.

120. Cf. "A Grammarian's Funeral," 83-4.

The Artificer's hand is not arrested 125  
 With us; we are rough-hewn, nowise polished:  
 They stand for our copy, and, once invested  
 With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

XVII

'T is a life-long toil till our lump be leaven—  
 The better! What 's come to perfection perishes. 130  
 Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven:  
 Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.  
 Thyself shall afford the example, Giotto!  
 Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,  
 Done at a stroke, was just (was it not?) "O!" 135  
 Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

XVIII

Is it true that we are now, and shall be hereafter,  
 But what and where depend on life's minute?  
 Hails heavenly cheer or infernal laughter  
 Our first step out of the gulf or in it? 140  
 Shall Man, such step within his endeavour,  
 Man's face, have no more play and action  
 Than joy which is crystallized for ever,  
 Or grief, an eternal petrification?

XIX

On which I conclude, that the early painters, 145  
 To cries of "Greek Art and what more wish you?"—  
 Replied, "To become now self-acquainters,  
 And paint man man, whatever the issue!  
 Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,  
 New fears aggrandize the rags and tatters: 150  
 To bring the invisible full into play!  
 Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters?"

131. A neat formulation of one of Browning's ideas concerning Heaven, which he expresses in such poems as "A Grammarian's Funeral," "Evelyn Hope," "Speculative,"—that after death, life is changed not in kind but in degree. Cf. the American Indian conception of a "happy hunting-ground" or the Teutonic warrior's Valhalla.

135. As an example of his skill, for Pope Benedict IX to examine, Giotto drew a perfect circle at one stroke.

## XX

Give these, I exhort you, their guerdon and glory  
 For daring so much, before they well did it.  
 The first of the new, in our race's story, 155  
 Beats the last of the old; 't is no idle quiddit.  
 The worthies began a revolution,  
 Which if on earth you intend to acknowledge,  
 Why, honour them now! (ends my allocution)  
 Nor confer your degree when the folk leave college. 160

## XXI

There 's a fancy some lean to and others hate—  
 That, when this life is ended, begins  
 New work for the soul in another state,  
 Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins:  
 Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries, 165  
 Repeat in large what they practised in small,  
 Through life after life in unlimited series;  
 Only the scale 's to be changed, that 's all.

## XXII

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen  
 By the means of Evil that Good is best, 170  
 And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene,—  
 When our faith in the same has stood the test—  
 Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,  
 The uses of labour are surely done;  
 There remaineth a rest for the people of God: 175  
 And I have had troubles enough, for one.

156. *Quiddit*: quibble. Cf. Browning's statement in "Parleying with Gerard de Lairesse," addressed to the Classic poets:

we poets go not back at all:  
 What you did we could do—from great to small  
 Sinking assuredly: if this world last  
 One moment longer when Man finds its Past  
 Exceed its Present—blame the Protoplast!  
 If we no longer see as you of old,  
 'T is we see deeper. Progress for the bold!  
 You saw the body, 't is the soul we see.

160. Browning was one of the earliest group of students to attend London University, but he stayed only a few months.

167. Notice the use of this interpretation of Heaven to solve the problem of unrequited love, in "Evelyn Hope," also in *Men and Women*.

XXIII

But at any rate I have loved the season  
 Or Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy;  
 My sculptor is Nicolo the Pisan,  
 My painter—who but Cimabue? 180  
 Nor ever was man of them all indeed,  
 From these to Ghiberti and Ghirlandajo,  
 Could say that he missed my critic-meed.  
 So, now to my special grievance—heigh ho!

XXIV

Their ghosts still stand, as I said before, 185  
 Watching each fresco flaked and rasped,  
 Blocked up, knocked out, or whitewashed o'er:  
 —No getting again what the church has grasped!  
 The works on the wall must take their chance;  
 “Works never conceded to England's thick clime!” 190  
 (I hope they prefer their inheritance  
 Of a bucketful of Italian quick-lime.)

XXV

When they go at length, with such a shaking  
 Of heads o'er the old delusion, sadly  
 Each master his way through the black streets taking, 195  
 Where many a lost work breathes though badly—  
 Why don't they bethink them of who has merited?  
 Why not reveal, while their pictures dree  
 Such doom, how a captive might be out-ferreted?  
 Why is it they never remember me? 200

XXVI

Not that I expect the great Bigordi,  
 Nor Sandro to hear me, chivalric, bellicose;

In the epilogue, “One Word More” (115), Browning endorses this as his own view.

179. *Nicolo the Pisan*: architect and sculptor from Pisa (1207–1278).

180. Giovanni Cimabue (1240–1302) was one of Giotto's teachers.

182. Lorenzo Ghiberti (1381–1455), Florentine sculptor, executed the eastern doors of the Baptistry at Florence. Domenico Bigordi, or Ghirlandajo (1449–94), was a Florentine fresco painter.

198. *Dree*: endure.

201. *Bigordi*: Ghirlandajo.

202. Sandro Filipepi is usually called Botticelli (1444–1510).



Nor the wrong Lippino; and not a word I  
 Say of a scrap of Frà Angelico's:  
 But are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi, 205  
 To grant me a taste of your intonaco,  
 Some Jerome that seeks the heaven with a sad eye?  
 Not a churlish saint, Lorenzo Monaco?

## XXVII

Could not the ghost with the close red cap,  
 My Pollajolo, the twice a craftsman, 210  
 Save me a sample, give me the hap  
 Of a muscular Christ that shows the draughtsman?  
 No Virgin by him the somewhat petty,  
 Of finical touch and tempera crumbly—  
 Could not Alesso Baldovinetti 215  
 Contribute so much, I ask him humbly?

## XXVIII

Margheritone of Arezzo,  
 With the grave-clothes garb and swaddling barret  
 (Why purse up mouth and beak in a pet so,  
 You bald old saturnine poll-clawed parrot?) 220  
 Not a poor glimmering Crucifixion,  
 Where in the foreground kneels the donor?  
 If such remain, as is my conviction,  
 The hoarding it does you but little honour.

203. *Lippino*: Filippino Lippi (1460-1505), son of Fra Lippo Lippi. (He was "wronged" by having his work ascribed to others.)

204. *Fra Angelico*: greatest of monastic painters (1387-1455).

205. Taddeo Gaddi (1300-1366), Giotto's godson and pupil, continued the building of the Campanile after Giotto's death.

206. *Intonaco*: rough plaster background for frescoes.

207. St. Jerome (340-420) was the Church Father who prepared the Vulgate translation of the Bible.

208. Lorenzo Monaco, a monastic painter who executed many works in the Calmaldoline monastery, followed the manner of Gaddi. See the comment on him and on Fra Angelico in "Fra Lippo Lippi," 233-236.

209 ff. Browning owned the pictures described in stanzas XXVII, XXVIII.

210. Antonio Pollaiuolo (1429-98), painter, sculptor, goldsmith, was one of the first artists to study anatomy.

214. *Tempera*: mixture of paint and a gummy substance.

215. *Alesso Baldovinetti*: Florentine painter (1422-99).

217. *Margheritone*: painter and sculptor (1236-1313) whose chief subject was the Crucifixion.

XXIX

They pass; for them the panels may thrill, 225  
 The tempera grow alive and tinglish;  
 Their pictures are left to the mercies still  
 Of dealers and stealers, Jews and the English,  
 Who, seeing mere money's worth in their prize,  
 Will sell it to somebody calm as Zeno 230  
 At naked High Art, and in ecstasies  
 Before some clay-clod vile Carlinol

XXX

No matter for these! But Giotto, you,  
 Have you allowed, as the town-tongues babble it,—  
 Oh, never! it shall not be counted true— 235  
 That a certain precious little tablet  
 Which Buonarroti eyed like a lover,—  
 Was buried so long in oblivion's womb  
 And, left for another than I to discover,  
 Turns up at last! and to whom?—to whom? 240

XXXI

I, that have haunted the dim San Spirito,  
 (Or was it rather the Ognissanti?)  
 Patient on altar-step planting a weary toe!  
 Nay, I shall have it yet! *Detur amanti!*  
 My Koh-i-noor—or (if that 's a platitude) 245  
 Jewel of Giamschid, the Persian Sofi's eye;  
 So, in anticipative gratitude,  
 What if I take up my hope and prophesy?

230. *Zeno*: the first Stoic philosopher.

232. *Carlino*: Carlo Dolci (1616–86), Florentine known for his smooth, lifeless paintings.

236–7. Michelangelo Buonarroti admired the little tablet which, Browning wrote, "was a famous *Last Supper*, mentioned by Vasari, and gone astray long ago from the Church of S. Spirito: it turned up, according to report, in some obscure corner, while I was in Florence."

241. *San Spirito*: the Church of the Holy Spirit. (See note to 236.)

242. *Ognissanti*: the Church of All Saints.

244. *Detur amanti*: Let it be given to its lover.

245. *Koh-i-noor*: one of the largest of existing diamonds, given to Queen Victoria in 1850.

246. *Jewel of Giamschid*: a great ruby.

## XXXII

When the hour grows ripe, and a certain dotard  
 Is pitched, no parcel that needs invoicing, 250  
 To the worse side of the Mont Saint Gothard,  
 We shall begin by way of rejoicing;  
 None of that shooting the sky (blank cartridge),  
 Nor a civic guard, all plumes and lacquer,  
 Hunting Radetzky's soul like a partridge 255  
 Over Morello with squib and cracker.

## XXXIII

This time we'll shoot better game and bag 'em hot—  
 No mere display at the stone of Dante,  
 But a kind of sober Witanagemot  
 (Ex: "Casa Guidi," *quod videas ante*) 260  
 Shall ponder, once Freedom restored to Florence,  
 How Art may return that departed with her.  
 Go, hated house, go each trace of the Lorraine's,  
 And bring us the days of Orgagna hither!

## XXXIV

How we shall prologize, how we shall perorate, 265  
 Utter fit things upon art and history,  
 Feel truth at blood-heat and falsehood at zero rate,  
 Make of the want of the age no mystery;  
 Contrast the fructuous and sterile eras,  
 Show—monarchy ever its uncouth cub licks 270

251. *Worse side*: over the Alps, out of Italy.

255. *Radetzky*: Austrian field marshal who held Italy in subjection; born in 1766, he is the "dotard" (old fool) of line 249.

256. *Morello*: mountain peak near Florence.  
 Italian patriots.

258. A stone on which Dante often sat was used as a rallying point for

259. *Witanagemot*: Anglo-Saxon predecessor of Parliament.

260. *Casa Guidi Windows* was the name of a poem by Mrs. Browning devoted to the cause of Italian liberty. Ex: "out of" . . . *quod videas ante*: "which you may have seen before."

263. The family of Duke Francis of Lorraine had controlled Florence since 1737.

264. *Orgagna*: Andrea di Cione (1315-76), Florentine painter of original genius, of the school of Giotto, the kind that flourished when Florence was free.

Out of the bear's shape into Chimæra's,  
While Pure Art's birth is still the republic's.

XXXV

Then one shall propose in a speech (curt Tuscan,  
Expurgate and sober, with scarcely an "*issimo*,")  
To end now our half-told tale of Cambuscan, 275  
And turn the bell-tower's *alt* to *altissimo*:  
And fine as the beak of a young beccaccia  
The Campanile, the Duomo's fit ally,  
Shall soar up in gold full fifty braccia,  
Completing Florence, as Florence Italy. 280

XXXVI

Shall I be alive that morning the scaffold  
Is broken away, and the long-pent fire,  
Like the golden hope of the world, unbaffled  
Springs from its sleep, and up goes the spire  
While "God and the People" plain for its motto, 285  
Thence the new tricolour flaps at the sky?  
At least to foresee that glory of Giotto  
And Florence together, the first aim I!

272. Though Browning has expressed here a view very popular among English-speaking peoples, the "truth" is not that monarchy always marks a "sterile" era. The Roman Empire under Augustus, the Tudor absolutism of Queen Elizabeth, the despotic reign of Louis XIV, saw the greatest literary art produced in their respective languages, Latin, English, and French; and one may add to these the great art of all kinds produced under the dictatorship of the Medici in later Florence. But as the Romantics like Byron and Shelley had faith that Greece upon being liberated would show again the creative genius of ancient Athens, so many Victorians hoped that the liberation and national unification of Italy would lead to a new birth of Art.

273. Dante made the Florentine speech ("curt Tuscan") the literary language of Italy.

274. *Issimo*: termination of the superlative in Italian.

275. *Half-told tale of Cambuscan*: Chaucer's uncompleted *Squire's Tale*. In *Il Penseroso*, Milton wishes to  
Call up him who left half told  
The story of Cambuscan bold.

276. *Alt to altissimo*: high to highest.

277. *Beccaccia*: woodcock.

279. According to Giotto's plans, a spire fifty braccia (cubits) high was to be added to the bell-tower.

## SAUL\*

## I

SAID Abner, "At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou speak,  
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it, and did  
kiss his cheek.

And he, "Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance  
sent,

Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent  
Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth yet, 5  
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet.  
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,  
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer nor of praise,  
To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their strife,  
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back upon  
life. 10

## II

"Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child with his  
dew

On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue  
Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no wild heat  
Were now raging to torture the desert!"

## III

Then I, as was meet,  
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on my feet, 15  
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent was  
unlooped;

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\* The first nine sections were published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845); the entire poem appeared first in *Men and Women* ten years later. The source is 1 Samuel, xvi, 14-23. The speaker is David, and it is his psychological experience that constitutes the subject of the poem, Saul serving merely as the object of David's love. The idea was suggested by Christopher Smart's preface to his "Ode to Music on Saint Cecilia's Day," "that is, David's playing to King Saul when he was troubled with the evil spirit." Browning also drew upon Smart's "Song to David," which he had known since boyhood. On Miss Parrett's advice the first part of the poem was printed in 1845, though incomplete; so far David had merely praised God for earthly joys. This is close enough to the character of the young David as it is presented in Samuel. In 1846 Browning married and in the next ten years, under his wife's influence, he formulated his religious philosophy, so that in the continuation David sings as a prophet of Christianity, the religion of Love. Compare the Psalms.

1. *Abner*: captain of Saul's army (1 Samuel, xxvi, 5).

I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I stooped;  
 Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all withered  
 and gone,  
 That extends to the second enclosure, I groped my way on  
 Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once more I  
 prayed, 20  
 And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not afraid  
 But spoke, "Here is David, thy servant!" And no voice replied.  
 At the first I saw naught but the blackness; but soon I descried  
 A something more black than the blackness—the vast, the  
 upright  
 Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into sight 25  
 Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.  
 Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof, showed Saul.

## IV

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out  
 wide  
 On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to each side;  
 He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his  
 pangs 30  
 And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,  
 Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come  
 With the spring-time,—so agonized Saul, drear and stark,  
 blind and dumb.

## V

Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we twine round  
 its chords  
 Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide—those sun-  
 beams like swords! 35  
 And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as, one after  
 one,  
 So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be done.  
 They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they have fed  
 Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed;  
 And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star 40  
 Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and so far!

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31. *King-serpent*: the boa constrictor, waiting the change of his skin.

## VI

—Then the tune for which quails on the cornland will each  
 leave his mate  
 To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets elate  
 Till for boldness they fight one another; and then, what has  
 weight  
 To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand house— 45  
 There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird and half  
 mouse!  
 God made all the creatures and gave them our love and our  
 fear,  
 To give sign, we and they are his children, one family here.

## VII

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their wine-song,  
 when hand  
 Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship, and great  
 hearts expand 50  
 And grow one in the sense of this world's life.—And then,  
 the last song  
 When the dead man is praised on his journey—"Bear, bear  
 him along  
 With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are balm  
 seeds not here  
 To console us? The land has none left such as he on the bier.  
 Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!"—And then, the  
 glad chaunt 55  
 Of the marriage,—first go the young maidens, next, she whom  
 we vaunt  
 As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.—And then, the  
 great march  
 Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress an arch  
 Naught can break; who shall harm them, our friends?—Then,  
 the chorus intoned  
 As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned. 60  
 But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul groaned.

## VIII

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and listened  
 apart;

---

45. *Jerboa*: the jumping hare, swift as a bird.

And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and sparkles  
 'gan dart  
 From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once with a start,  
 All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart. 65  
 So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung there erect.  
 And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it unchecked,  
 As I sang:—

## IX

“Oh, our manhood’s prime vigour! No spirit feels waste,  
 Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.  
 Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock, 70  
 The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver  
 shock  
 Of the plunge in a pool’s living water, the hunt of the bear,  
 And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.  
 And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust  
 divine,  
 And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught  
 of wine, 75  
 And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell  
 That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.  
 How good is man’s life, the mere living! how fit to employ  
 All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy!  
 Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword  
 thou didst guard 80  
 When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for glorious  
 reward?  
 Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up as men  
 sung  
 The low song of the nearly-departed, and hear her faint tongue  
 Joining in while it could to the witness, ‘Let one more attest,  
 I have lived, seen God’s hand thro’ a lifetime, and all was for  
 best?’ 85  
 Then they sung thro’ their tears in strong triumph, not much,  
 but the rest.  
 And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the working  
 whence grew

---

78–9. A famous expression of gusto for life, especially for physical sensation. But the idea that this is fit to employ the soul forever is not Biblical. For Browning’s conception of “the soul” see Section IV of the Introduction.



Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the spirit strained  
 true:  
 And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood of wonder and  
 hope,  
 Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the eye's  
 scope,— 90  
 Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is thine;  
 And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one head  
 combine!  
 On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and rage (like  
 the throe  
 That, a-work in the rock, helps its labour and lets the gold go)  
 High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning  
 them,—all 95  
 Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—King Saul!"

## X

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,—heart, hand, harp and  
 voice,  
 Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding rejoice  
 Saul's fame in the light it was made for—as when, dare I say,  
 The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains through its  
 array, 100  
 And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot—"Saul!" cried I, and  
 stopped,  
 And waited the thing that should follow. Then Saul, who  
 hung propped  
 By the tent's cross-support in the centre, was struck by his name.  
 Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes right to  
 the aim,  
 And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that held (he  
 alone, 105  
 While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a broad  
 bust of stone

---

96. At first the poem ended here, the last four lines reading:

On the one head the joy and the pride, even rage like the throe  
 That opes the rock, helps its glad labor, and lets the gold go—  
 And ambition that sees a man lead it—oh, all of these—all  
 Combine to unite in one creature—Saul!

Notice, in what follows, the shift in emphasis from human to divine,  
 from earthly pleasures to immortal hopes.

A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,—leaves grasp  
 of the sheet?  
 Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down to his  
 feet,  
 And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet, your mountain  
 of old,  
 With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages untold— 110  
 Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each furrow and  
 scar  
 Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest—all hail, there  
 they are!  
 —Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold the nest  
 Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the green on his  
 crest  
 For their food in the ardours of summer. One long shudder  
 thrilled 115  
 All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and was stilled  
 At the King's self left standing before me, released and aware.  
 What was gone, what remained? All to traverse, 'twixt hope  
 and despair;  
 Death was past, life not come: so he waited. Awhile his  
 right hand  
 Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant forthwith to  
 remand 120  
 To their place what new objects should enter: 't was Saul  
 as before.  
 I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was hurt any  
 more  
 Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch from the  
 shore,  
 At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean—a sun's slow decline  
 Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap and  
 entwine 125  
 Base with base to knit strength more intensely: so, arm folded  
 arm  
 O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

## XI

What spell or what charm,  
 (For awhile there was trouble within me) what next should  
 I urge

To sustain him where song had restored him?—Song filled to  
the verge

His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that it yields 130  
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty: beyond, on what  
fields,

Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten the eye  
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the cup they  
put by?

He saith, "It is good;" still he drinks not: he lets me praise life,  
Gives assent, yet would die for his own part. 135

## XII

Then fancies grew rife

Which had come long ago on the pasture, when round me the  
sheep

Fed in silence—above, the one eagle wheeled slow as in sleep;  
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that might lie  
'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt the hill and  
the sky:

And I laughed—"Since my days are ordained to be passed with  
my flocks, 140

Let me people at least, with my fancies, the plains and the rocks,  
Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image the show  
Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly shall know!  
Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the courage that  
gains,

And the prudence that keeps what men strive for." And now  
these old trains 145

Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so, once more the  
string

Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus—

## XIII

"Yea, my King,"

I began—"thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts that spring  
From the mere mortal life held in common by man and by  
brute:

In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears  
fruit. 150

Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,—how its stem  
trembled first

Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then safely outburst  
The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when these too,  
in turn

Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect: yet more was  
to learn,

E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit. Our dates  
shall we slight, 155

When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or care for the  
plight

Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them? Not so!  
stem and branch

Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the palm-wine  
shall staunch

Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee such wine.  
Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be thine! 160

By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still shalt enjoy  
More indeed, than at first when unconscious, the life of a boy.

Crush that life, and behold its wine running! Each deed thou  
hast done

Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun  
Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil him, though  
tempests efface, 165

Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must everywhere  
trace

The results of his past summer-prime,—so, each ray of thy will,  
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill  
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardour, till they too give  
forth

A like cheer to their sons, who in turn, fill the South and the  
North 170

With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse in the  
past!

But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at last:

As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at her height  
So with man—so his power and his beauty for ever take flight.  
No! Again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look forth o'er  
the years! 175

Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin with the  
seer's!

Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his tomb—bid  
arise

A grey mountain of marble heaped four-square, till, built to the  
 skies,  
 Let it mark where the great First King slumbers: whose fame  
 would ye know?  
 Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record shall  
 go 180  
 In great characters cut by the scribe,—Such was Saul, so he did;  
 With the sages directing the work, by the populace chid,—  
 For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there! Which fault to  
 amend,  
 In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon they shall  
 spend  
 (See, in tablets 't is level before them) their praise, and  
 record 185  
 With the gold of the graver, Saul's story,—the statesman's great  
 word  
 Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The river's a-wave  
 With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when prophet-  
 winds rave:  
 So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their part  
 In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that thou  
 art!" 190

## XIV

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who didst grant me  
 that day,  
 And before it not seldom hast granted thy help to essay,  
 Carry on and complete an adventure,—my shield and my sword  
 In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was my  
 word,—  
 Still be with me, who then at the summit of human en-  
 deavour 195  
 And scaling the highest, man's thought could, gazed hopeless  
 as ever  
 On the new stretch of heaven above me—till, mighty to save,  
 Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance—God's throne  
 from man's gravel  
 Let me tell out my tale to its ending—my voice to my heart  
 Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels last night I took  
 part, 200  
 As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with my sheep,

And still fear lest the terrible glory evanish like sleep!  
 For I wake in the grey dewy covert, while Hebron upheaves  
 The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and Kidron  
 retrieves  
 Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine. 205

## XV

I say then,—my song  
 While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and ever more strong  
 Made a proffer of good to console him—he slowly resumed  
 His old motions and habitudes kingly. The right-hand re-  
 plumed  
 His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted the swathes  
 Of his turban, and see—the huge sweat that his countenance  
 bathes, 210  
 He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his loins as of  
 yore,  
 And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the clasp set before.  
 He is Saul, ye remember in glory,—ere error had bent  
 The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, though  
 much spent  
 Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did  
 choose, 215  
 To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose.  
 So sank he along by the tent-prop till, stayed by the pile  
 Of his armour and war-cloak and garments, he leaned there  
 awhile,  
 And sat out my singing,—one arm round the tent-prop, to raise  
 His bent head, and the other hung slack—till I touched on the  
 praise 220  
 I foresaw from all men in all time, to the man patient there;  
 And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then first I was  
 'ware  
 That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his vast knees  
 Which were thrust out on each side around me, like oak-roots  
 which please  
 To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up to know 225

203. *Hebron*: mountain in Judea and the city that is on it.

204. *Kidron*: brook near Jerusalem.

213. *Error*: see 1 Samuel, xv. Saul had disobeyed Jehovah's command to kill all the Amalekites.

If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke not, but slow  
 Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care  
 Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow: thro' my  
 hair

The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my head, with  
 kind power—

All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower. 230

Thus held he me there with his great eyes that scrutinized  
 mine—

And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where was the sign?

I yearned—"Could I help thee, my father, inventing a bliss,

I would add, to that life of the past, both the future and this;

I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence, 235

As this moment,—had love but the warrant, love's heart to  
 dispense!"

## XVI

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more—no song more.  
 outbroke—

## XVII

"I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I spoke:

I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain

And pronounced on the rest of his handwork—returned him  
 again 240

His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw:

I report, as a man may of God's work—all's love, yet all's law.

Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me. Each faculty tasked

To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where a dewdrop was  
 asked.

Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at Wisdom laid  
 bare. 245

Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank, to the Infinite  
 Care!

Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?

I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no less,

In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God

In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod. 250

And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew

(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)

The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete

As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet.  
 Yet with all this abounding experience, this deity known, 255  
 I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of my own.  
 There's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to hoodwink,  
 I am fain to keep still in abeyance, (I laugh as I think)  
 Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I worst  
 E'en the Giver in one gift.—Behold, I could love if I durst! 260  
 But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may o'ertake  
 God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain for love's sake.  
 —What, my soul? see thus far and no farther? when doors great  
 and small,  
 Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should the hundredth  
 appall?  
 In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the greatest of  
 all? 265  
 Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,  
 That I doubt his own love can compete with it? Here, the  
 parts shift?  
 Here, the creature surpass the Creator,—the end, what Began?  
 Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,  
 And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet alone  
 can? 270  
 Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much less  
 power,  
 To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous dower  
 Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,  
 Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering the whole?  
 And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest) 275  
 These good things being given, to go on, and give one more,  
 the best?  
 Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height  
 This perfection,—succeed with life's dayspring, death's minute  
 of night?  
 Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the mistake,  
 Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now,—and bid him awake 280  
 From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set  
 Clear and safe in new light and new life,—a new harmony yet

---

257-262. It is doubtful that David, or any Biblical character, could be conceived of as making such a statement, expressing fear that if he does not hold himself in, he will be more loving than God. It is rather Browning who speaks here; elsewhere he shows a similar feeling.



To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?—or endure!  
The man taught enough by life's dream, of the rest to make  
sure;

By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss, 285  
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this.

## XVIII

"I believe it! 'T is thou, God, that givest 't is I who receive:  
In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.  
All's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my  
prayer

As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air. 290  
From thy will, stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread  
Sabaoth.

I will?—the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth  
To look that, even that in the face too? Why is it I dare  
Think but lightly of such impuissance? What stops my despair?  
This;—'t is not what man Does which exalts him, but what man  
Would do! 295

See the King—I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall  
through.

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,  
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would—knowing which,  
I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me now!  
Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt  
thou! 300

So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown—  
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down  
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,  
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!  
As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved 305  
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved!

288. Contrast Dante's "In His will is our peace" (*Paradise*, III, 85)—an expression of obedience of heart and conduct.

291. *Sabaoth*: armies.

295-9. This is said in a spirit very different from that of the Psalmist's "contrite heart." (Contrast especially Psalm li.)

300. Here, and in lines 266-7, faith has been expressed that God will in time suffer as the speaker is now willing to suffer, and will show as much loving-kindness. Browning saw in the universe proof of the Power of God, but not of His Love, which he deduced from the love he felt within his own breast. Cf. "A Death in the Desert," lines 551-62.

He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.

'T is the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek

In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me, 310

Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a Hand like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

## XIX

I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.

There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and to right,

Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware: 315

I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as strugglingly there,

As a runner beset by the populace famished for news—

Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with her crews;

And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot

Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I fainted

not, 320

For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, suppressed

All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy behest,

Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to rest.

Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from earth—

Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender birth; 325

In the gathered intensity brought to the grey of the hills;

In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden wind-thrills;

In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with eye sidling still

Though averted with wonder and dread; in the birds stiff and chill

That rose heavily, as I approached them, made stupid with awe: 330

E'en the serpent that slid away silent,—he felt the new law.

331 ff. Not only animals, reptiles, and plants, but even inanimate brooklets understand "the new law" that God is Love. This is far from orthodox, belonging rather between Romantic Naturalism and the vitalism of Bergson and Shaw. But compare Psalms xcvi and cxlviii, or St. Francis' conception of Nature.

The same stared in the white humid faces upturned by the  
 flowers;  
 The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved the vine-  
 bowers:  
 And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,  
 With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—"E'en so, it is  
 so!"

335

### "DE GUSTIBUS—"\*

#### I

YOUR ghost will walk, you lover of trees,  
 (If our loves remain)  
 In an English lane,  
 By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies.  
 Hark, those two in the hazel coppice— 5  
 A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,  
 Making love, say,—  
 The happier they!  
 Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,  
 And let them pass, as they will too soon, 10  
 With the bean-flowers' boon,  
 And the blackbird's tune,  
 And May, and June!

#### II

What I love best in all the world  
 Is a castle, precipice-encurled, 15  
 In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine.  
 Or look for me, old fellow of mine,  
 (If I get my head from out the mouth  
 O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,  
 And come again to the land of lands)— 20  
 In a sea-side house to the farther South,  
 Where the baked cicala dies of drouth,  
 And one sharp tree—'t is a cypress—stands  
 By the many hundred years red-rusted,

---

\* *De gustibus non est disputandum*, "there is no disputing about tastes." The poet's friend prefers English scenery; but Browning prefers Italy. This poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Contrast "Home Thoughts, from Abroad," which was published ten years before.

4. *Cornfield*: field of grain, not Indian corn.

22. *Cicala*: cicada.

Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted, 25  
 My sentinel to guard the sands  
 To the water's edge. For, what expands  
 Before the house, but the great opaque  
 Blue breadth of sea without a break?  
 While, in the house, for ever crumbles 30  
 Some fragment of the frescoed walls,  
 From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.  
 A girl bare-footed brings, and tumbles  
 Down on the pavement, green-flesh melons,  
 And says there's news to-day—the king 35  
 Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,  
 Goes with his Bourbon arm in a sling:  
 —She hopes they have not caught the felons.  
 Italy, my Italy!  
 Queen Mary's saying serves for me— 40  
 (When fortune's malice  
 Lost her—Calais)  
 Open my heart and you will see  
 Graved inside of it, "Italy."  
 Such lovers old are I and she; 45  
 So it always was, so shall ever be!

PROTUS\*

AMONG these latter busts we count by scores,  
 Half-emperors and quarter-emperors,

35 ff. The Bourbon, Ferdinand II, King of the Two Sicilies, was a hated tyrant.

36. *Liver-wing*: right wing (arm).

40-2. Queen Mary of England lost Calais, England's last French possession, in 1558, and she said that after her death the name of Calais would be found written on her heart.

43-4. These two lines were inscribed on a tablet and attached to the wall of the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice, where Browning died.

46. In 1855 this ended "so it still shall be!" But after the death of his wife he left Italy and in 1863 appeared the present reading.

\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). Any reader of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* will recognize this as a typical situation, but the quoted chronicle and both of these Emperors are fictitious. Even Gibbon could not surpass the irony with which Browning in a few lines lights up an epoch.

2. Diocletian, Roman Emperor 284-305 A.D., reorganized the Empire so that its administration would be divided between two *Augusti* ("half-emperors") and—subordinate to them—two *Caesars* ("quarter-emperors").

Each with his bay-leaf fillet, loose-thonged vest,  
 Loric and low-browed Gorgon on the breast,—  
 One loves a baby face, with violets there, 5  
 Violets instead of laurel in the hair,  
 As those were all the little locks could bear.

Now read here. "Protus ends a period  
 Of empery beginning with a god;  
 Born in the porphyry chamber at Byzant, 10  
 Queens by his cradle, proud and ministrant:  
 And if he quickened breath there, 't would like fire  
 Pantingly through the dim vast realm transpire.  
 A fame that he was missing spread afar:  
 The world, from its four corners, rose in war, 15  
 Till he was borne out on a balcony  
 To pacify the world when it should see.  
 The captains ranged before him, one, his hand  
 Made baby points at, gained the chief command.  
 And day by day more beautiful he grew 20  
 In shape, all said, in feature and in hue,  
 While young Greek sculptors, gazing on the child,  
 Became with old Greek sculpture reconciled.  
 Already sages laboured to condense  
 In easy tomes a life's experience: 25  
 And artists took grave counsel to impart  
 In one breath and one hand-sweep, all their art—  
 To make his graces prompt as blossoming  
 Of plentifully-watered palms in spring:  
 Since well beseems it, whoso mounts the throne, 30  
 For beauty, knowledge, strength, should stand alone,  
 And mortals love the letters of his name."

—Stop! Have you turned two pages? Still the same.  
 New reign, same date. The scribe goes on to say  
 How that same year, on such a month and day, 35  
 "John the Pannonian, groundedly believed

4. *Loric*: leather cuirass. *Gorgon*: Gorgon's head on an amulet worn as protection against the evil eye.

10. *Byzant*: Byzantium, later called Constantinople, capital of the Roman Empire in its period of effete decadence.

36. *Pannonian*: from Pannonia (on the Danube, in Central Europe).

A blacksmith's bastard, whose hard hand reprieved  
 The Empire from its fate the year before,—  
 Came, had a mind to take the crown, and wore  
 The same for six years (during which the Huns 40  
 Kept off their fingers from us), till his sons  
 Put something in his liquor"—and so forth.  
 Then a new reign. Stay—"Take at its just worth"  
 (Subjoins an annotator) "what I give  
 As hearsay. Some think, John let Protus live 45  
 And slip away. 'T is said, he reached man's age  
 At some blind northern court; made, first a page,  
 Then tutor to the children; last, of use  
 About the hunting-stables. I deduce  
 He wrote the little tract 'On worming dogs,' 50  
 Whereof the name in sundry catalogues  
 Is extant yet. A Protus of the race  
 Is rumoured to have died a monk in Thrace,—  
 And if the same, He reached senility."

Here's John the Smith's rough-hammered head. Great eye, 55  
 Gross jaw and griped lips do what granite can  
 To give you the crown-grasper. What a man!

## HOLY-CROSS DAY\*

### ON WHICH THE JEWS WERE FORCED TO ATTEND AN ANNUAL CHRISTIAN SERMON IN ROME

[“Now was come about Holy-Cross Day, and now must my  
 lord preach his first sermon to the Jews: as it was of old cared  
 for in the merciful bowels of the Church, that, so to speak, a  
 crumb at least from her conspicuous table here in Rome should

50. Pannonia was famous for its hunting dogs. The production of  
 such a treatise under such circumstances would be characteristic of the later  
 Empire.

53. *Thrace*: a region north of Greece.

55-7. The hard sounds here (especially “gr-”) may be contrasted with  
 the liquid softness of some of the lines (*e.g.*, 10-13) in which the poet is  
 not only referring to over-refined, decadent Byzantium, but is accompany-  
 ing his meaning with the appropriate esthetic effects.

\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). Browning had probably read in  
*Six Months in Italy*, by his friend G. S. Hillard, that a bull of Pope Gregory  
 XIII issued in 1584 compelled all Jews above the age of twelve to listen

be, though but once yearly, cast to the famishing dogs, under-trampled and bespitten-upon beneath the feet of the guests. And a moving sight in truth, this, of so many of the besotted blind restif and ready-to-perish Hebrews! now maternally brought—nay (for He saith, 'Compel them to come in') haled, as it were, by the head and hair, and against their obstinate hearts, to partake of the heavenly grace. What awakening, what striving with tears, what working of a yeasty conscience! Nor was my lord wanting to himself on so apt an occasion; witness the abundance of conversions which did incontinently reward him: though not to my lord be altogether the glory."—*Diary by the Bishop's Secretary*, 1600.]

What the Jews really said, on thus being driven to church, was rather to this effect:—

## I

FEE, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!  
 Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week.  
 Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,  
 Stinking and savoury, smug and gruff,  
 Take the church-road, for the bell's due chime  
 Gives us the summons—'t is sermon-time! 5

## II

Boh, here 's Barnabas! Job, that 's you?  
 Up stumps Solomon—bustling too?  
 Shame, man! greedy beyond your years

every week to a Christian sermon, and "to this day" (1853) several times in the course of a year a Jewish congregation gathered in the Church of S. Angelo in the Fish-Market (Pescheris) near the Ghetto to listen to a sermon by a Dominican friar. The humor of the situation appealed to Browning, and he imagines what "really" happened, psychologically. In the old conflict between Catholic and Jew, Browning's sympathies were clearly with the latter: his attacks on Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic are numerous (e.g., "The Heretic's Tragedy") and in many poems he is very favorable to the Jews. This led to the belief that he had Jewish blood, but there seems to be no foundation for that belief. Browning had a temperamental sympathy with many attitudes which have been considered "Jewish." His biographers say he "always wrote admirably when he wrote of Jews."

*Diary*: this entry is imaginary. Holy-Cross day commemorates the dedication in 335 A.D. of the churches built on the sites of the Crucifixion and the Holy Sepulchre, near Jerusalem.

To handsel the bishop's shaving-shears? 10  
 Fair play 's a jewel! Leave friends in the lurch?  
 Stand on a line ere you start for the church!

## III

Higgledy piggedy, packed we lie,  
 Rats in a hamper, swine in a sty,  
 Wasps in a bottle, frogs in a sieve, 15  
 Worms in a carcase, fleas in a sleeve.  
 Hist! square shoulders, settle your thumbs  
 And buzz for the bishop—here he comes.

## IV

Bow, wow, wow—a bone for the dog!  
 I liken his Grace to an acorned hog. 20  
 What, a boy at his side, with the bloom of a lass,  
 To help and handle my lord's hour-glass!  
 Didst ever behold so lithe a chine?  
 His cheek hath laps like a fresh-singed swine.

## V

Aaron 's asleep—shove hip to haunch, 25  
 Or somebody deal him a dig in the paunch!  
 Look at the purse with the tassel and knob,  
 And the gown with the angel and thingumbob!  
 What 's he at, quotha? reading his text!  
 Now you 've his curtesy—and what comes next 30

## VI

See to our converts—you doomed black dozen—  
 No stealing away—nor cog nor cozen!  
 You five, that were thieves, deserve it fairly;  
 You seven, that were beggars, will live less sparely;  
 You took your turn and dipped in the hat, 35  
 Got fortune—and fortune gets you; mind that!

23. *Chine*: backbone.

29. *Quotha*: indeed!

31. *Doomed* . . . *dozen*: the ones who must pretend to be converted.

32. *Cog* and *cozen*: cheat.



## VII

Give your first groan—compunction 's at work;  
 And soft! from a Jew you mount to a Turk.  
 Lo, Micah,—the selfsame beard on chin  
 He was four times already converted in! 40  
 Here 's a knife, clip quick—it 's a sign of grace—  
 Or he ruins us all with his hanging-face.

## VIII

Whom now is the bishop a-leering at?  
 I know a point where his text falls pat.  
 I 'll tell him to-morrow, a word just now 45  
 Went to my heart and made me vow  
 I meddle no more with the worst of trades—  
 Let somebody else pay his serenades.

## IX

Groan all together now, whee—hee—hee!  
 It 's a-work, it 's a-work, ah, woe is me! 50  
 It began, when a herd of us, picked and placed,  
 Were spurred through the Corso, stripped to the waist;  
 Jew brutes, with sweat and blood well spent  
 To usher in worthily Christian Lent.

## X

It grew, when the hangman entered our bounds, 55  
 Yelled, pricked us out to his church like hounds:  
 It got to a pitch, when the hand indeed  
 Which gutted my purse would throttle my creed:  
 And it overflows when, to even the odd,  
 Men I helped to their sins help me to their God. 60

## XI

But now, while the scapegoats leave our flock,  
 And the rest sit silent and count the clock,  
 Since forced to muse the appointed time  
 On these precious facts and truths sublime,—  
 Let us fitly employ it, under our breath, 65  
 In saying Ben Ezra's Song of Death.

52. *Corso*: a street in Rome.

66 ff. Rabbi Ben Ezra (see Browning's poem by that name) was a Medieval Jewish philosopher whose "Song of Death" is used here. Browning wrote to Dr. Furnivall, February 17, 1888, that in this passage Ben Ezra

## XII

For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,  
 Called sons and sons' sons to his side,  
 And spoke, "This world has been harsh and strange;  
 Something is wrong: there needeth a change. 70  
 But what, or where? at the last or first?  
 In one point only we sinned, at worst.

## XIII

"The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,  
 And again in his border see Israel set.  
 When Judah beholds Jerusalem, 75  
 The stranger-seed shall be joined to them:  
 To Jacob's House shall the Gentiles cleave.  
 So the Prophet saith and his sons believe.

## XIV

"Ay, the children of the chosen race  
 Shall carry and bring them to their place: 80  
 In the land of the Lord shall lead the same,  
 Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame,  
 When the slaves enslave, the oppressed ones o'er  
 The oppressor triumph for evermore?

## XV

"God spoke, and gave us the word to keep, 85  
 Bade never fold the hands nor sleep  
 'Mid a faithless world,—at watch and ward,  
 Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.  
 By His servant Moses the watch was set:  
 Though near upon cock-crow, we keep it yet. 90

## XVI

"Thou! if thou wast He, who at mid-watch came,  
 By the starlight, naming a dubious name!  
 And if, too heavy with sleep—too rash

---

is not supposed to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah in his retort that the so-called Christians are, even by their own Lawgiver, condemned.

91-2. If He, Jesus, was really the Messiah.

With fear—O Thou, if that martyr-gash  
 Fell on Thee coming to take thine own, 95  
 And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne—

## XVII

“Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus.  
 But, the Judgment over, join sides with us!  
 Thine too is the cause! and not more thine  
 Than ours, is the work of these dogs and swine, 100  
 Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed!  
 Who maintain Thee in word, and defy Thee in deed!

## XVIII

“We withstood Christ then? Be mindful how  
 At least we withstand Barabbas now!  
 Was our outrage sore? But the worst we spared, 105  
 To have called these—Christians, had we dared!  
 Let defiance to them pay mistrust of Thee,  
 And Rome make amends for Calvary!

## XIX

“By the torture, prolonged from age to age,  
 By the infamy, Israel’s heritage, 110  
 By the Ghetto’s plague, by the garb’s disgrace,  
 By the badge of shame, by the felon’s place,  
 By the branding-tool, the bloody whip,  
 And the summons to Christian fellowship,—

## XX

“We boast our proof that at least the Jew 115  
 Would wrest Christ’s name from the Devil’s crew.  
 Thy face took never so deep a shade  
 But we fought them in it, God our aid!  
 A trophy to bear, as we march, thy band,  
 South, East, and on to the Pleasant Land!” 120

[*Pope Gregory XVI abolished this bad business of the sermon.*  
 —R. B.]

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121. (Note) The papal bull to abolish this practice was issued officially in 1846.

## THE GUARDIAN ANGEL\*

## A PICTURE AT FANO

## I

DEAR and great Angel, wouldst thou only leave  
 That child, when thou hast done with him, for me!  
 Let me sit all the day here, that when eve  
 Shall find performed thy special ministry,  
 And time come for departure, thou, suspending 5  
 Thy flight, mayst see another child for tending,  
 Another still, to quiet and retrieve.

## II

Then I shall feel thee step one step, no more,  
 From where thou standest now, to where I gaze,  
 —And suddenly my head is covered o'er 10  
 With those wings, white above the child who prays  
 Now on that tomb—and I shall feel thee guarding  
 Me, out of all the world; for me, discarding  
 Yon heaven thy home, that waits and opes its door.

## III

I would not look up thither past thy head 15  
 Because the door opes, like that child, I know,  
 For I should have thy gracious face instead,  
 Thou bird of God! And wilt thou bend me low  
 Like him, and lay, like his, my hands together,  
 And lift them up to pray, and gently tether 20  
 Me, as thy lamb there, with thy garment's spread?

## IV

If this was ever granted, I would rest  
 My head beneath thine, while thy healing hands  
 Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,  
 Pressing the brain, which too much thought expands, 25

\* Written in July, 1848, and published in *Men and Women* (1855). Browning himself is speaking of the picture called *L'Angelo Custode* that was in the Church of San Agostino (St. Augustine) in Fano, a small Italian city on the Adriatic.

6. *Another child*: Browning himself, yearning to be protected from "the world" and from "too much thought." This poem should be interpreted in the light of the fact that the poet lived under his mother's care until he was

Back to its proper size again, and smoothing  
Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,  
And all lay quiet, happy and suppressed.

## V

How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!  
I think how I should view the earth and skies 30  
And sea, when once again my brow was bared  
After thy healing, with such different eyes.  
O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:  
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.  
What further may be sought for or declared? 35

## VI

Guercino drew this angel I saw teach  
(Alfred, dear friend!)—that little child to pray,  
Holding the little hands up, each to each  
Pressed gently,—with his own head turned away

34 (leaving college after a few months to cultivate his mind privately, in his mother's garden) and left home only when he married a woman of 40, here identified as "my angel."

25-28. Notice the indication here of a deep psychological basis for Browning's dislike of rationalism.

29-35. Compare this (and the preceding stanza) with the ideas of Keats (one of the most important influences in forming the mind of Browning), especially *Lamia*, 229-236; *Ode to a Nightingale*, 27; and *Ode on a Grecian Urn*:

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity: . . .

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. (44-5, 49-50.)

33-35. Notice that although Browning here expresses a characteristic extreme Romantic faith that the whole duty of man consists in a quiescent esthetic appreciation of scenery, he has also indicated that "brain" and "too much thought" interfere with the acceptance of this view. Intellectual interference can be "suppressed," however, by the motherly, "soothing" caresses of an angel-wife. He then identifies this "quiet, happy" resignation with doing one's duty, going far beyond Keats, who simply ignored the ethical in his esthetic thought. On this current of thought, see Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism*.

36. *Guercino*: "the squinter," Giovanni Francesco Barberini (1590-1660), painter of the picture which Browning is here making use of for a philosophy utterly different from the Christianity which inspired the painting. Browning had admired Guercino's work in the Dulwich Gallery near his home.

37. *Alfred*: Domett, his friend.

Over the earth where so much lay before him 40  
 Of work to do, though Heaven was opening o'er him,  
 And he was left at Fano by the beach.

## VII

We were at Fano, and three times we went  
 To sit and see him in his chapel there,  
 And drink his beauty to our soul's content 45  
 —My angel with me too: and since I care  
 For dear Guercino's fame (to which in power  
 And glory comes this picture for a dower,  
 Fraught with a pathos so magnificent)—

## VIII

And since he did not work thus earnestly 50  
 At all times, and has else endured some wrong—  
 I took one thought his picture struck from me,  
 And spread it out, translating it to song.  
 My love is here. Where are you, dear old friend?  
 How rolls the Wairoa at your world's far end? 55  
 This is Ancona, yonder is the sea.

## CLEON\*

"As certain also of your own poets have said"—

CLEON the poet (from the sprinkled isles,  
 Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea,  
 And laugh their pride when the light wave lisps "Greece")—  
 To Protus in his Tyranny: much health!

46. *My Angel*: Browning's wife.

55. *Wairoa*: a river in New Zealand, where Alfred Domett had gone.

56. *Ancona*: a town in Italy near Fano.

\* In a letter to his royal patron, Cleon, a cultivated Greek of the decadence (who argues sophistically that it is not decadence), complacent over his achievements but really filled with a sense of futility, makes us realize that the Classical world is ready for Christianity, the religious message that is being preached by St. Paul (Paulus) "Apostle to the Gentiles." Yet Cleon retains, throughout, the detached scepticism that one sees also in Pilate's "What is Truth?" The dilettante characteristics (*e.g.*, considering Homer and Terpander from the point of view of the artistic types they mastered rather than for their creative power) are presented graphically by Browning, who lived in an age that saw again the complacency, decadence,

They give thy letter to me, even now: 5  
 I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.  
 The master of thy galley still unlades  
 Gift after gift; they block my court at last  
 And pile themselves along its portico  
 Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee: 10  
 And one white she-slave from the group dispersed  
 Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work  
 Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,  
 Now covered with this settle-down of doves),  
 One lyric woman, in her crocus vest 15  
 Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands  
 Commends to me the strainer and the cup  
 Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence!  
 For so shall men remark, in such an act 20  
 Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,  
 Thy recognition of the use of life;  
 Nor call thy spirit barely adequate  
 To help on life in straight ways, broad enough  
 For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest. 25  
 Thou, in the daily building of thy tower,—  
 Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of toil,  
 Or through dim lulls of unapparent growth,  
 Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim  
 Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect,— 30

and dilettantism represented here. Paul Elmer More, in "Why is Browning Popular?" (*Shelburne Essays, Third Series*) says, "in reality, through this monologue, suspended delicately between self-examination and dramatic confession, he is focussing in one individual heart the doom of the great civilization that is passing away and the splendid triumph of the new."

It was published in *Men and Women* (1855). A. W. Crawford (in *Journal of English and German Philology*, Oct. 1927, xxiv, 485 ff) suggests that the occasion of this poem was Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*, published in 1852 and omitted by Arnold from his edition of 1853 because in it "there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done" (Preface of 1853). When Arnold reinstated *Empedocles* in his *New Poems* (1867), he wrote to his brother, "Browning's desire that I should reprint 'Empedocles' was really the cause of the volume appearing at all" (*Letters*, ed. Russell, 1895, I, 431). The quotation at the head of the poem is from Acts, xvii, 28, spoken at Athens by St. Paul, who is referred to at the end of the poem. Cleon and Protus are both fictitious, but typical of their age.

1. *Sprinkled isles*: the Sporades, east of Greece.

Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's sake—  
 Hadst ever in thy heart the luring hope  
 Of some eventual rest a-top of it,  
 Whence, all the tumult of the building hushed,  
 Thou first of men mightst look out to the East: 35  
 The vulgar saw thy tower, thou sawest the sun.  
 For this, I promise on thy festival  
 To pour libation, looking o'er the sea,  
 Making this slave narrate thy fortunes, speak  
 Thy great words, and describe thy royal face— 40  
 Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most,  
 Within the eventual element of calm.

Thy letter's first requirement meets me here.  
 It is as thou hast heard: in one short life  
 I, Cleon, have effected all those things 45  
 Thou wonderingly dost enumerate.  
 That epos on thy hundred plates of gold  
 Is mine,—and also mine the little chant,  
 So sure to rise from every fishing-bark  
 When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their net. 50  
 The image of the sun-god on the phare,  
 Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine;  
 The Pæcile, o'er-storied its whole length,  
 As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine too.  
 I know the true proportions of a man 55  
 And woman also, not observed before;  
 And I have written three books on the soul,  
 Proving absurd all written hitherto,  
 And putting us to ignorance again.  
 For music,—why, I have combined the moods, 60  
 Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine;  
 Thus much the people know and recognize,  
 Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel not.  
 We of these latter days, with greater mind  
 Than our forerunners, since more composite, 65  
 Look not so great, beside their simple way,  
 To a judge who only sees one way at once,

47. An epic poem engraved on golden tablets.

51. The statue of Apollo on the lighthouse.

53. *Pæcile*: the Portico at Athens with its paintings.



One mind-point and no other at a time,—  
 Compares the small part of a man of us  
 With some whole man of the heroic age, 70  
 Great in his way—not ours, nor meant for ours.  
 And ours is greater, had we skill to know:  
 For, what we call this life of men on earth,  
 This sequence of the soul's achievements here  
 Being, as I find much reason to conceive, 75  
 Intended to be viewed eventually  
 As a great whole, not analyzed to parts,  
 But each part having reference to all,—  
 How shall a certain part, pronounced complete,  
 Endure effacement by another part? 80  
 Was the thing done?—then, what 's to do again?  
 See, in the chequered pavement opposite,  
 Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,  
 And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid—  
 He did not overlay them, superimpose 85  
 The new upon the old and blot it out,  
 But laid them on a level in his work,  
 Making at last a picture; there it lies.  
 So, first the perfect separate forms were made,  
 The portions of mankind; and after, so, 90  
 Occurred the combination of the same.  
 For where had been a progress, otherwise?  
 Mankind, made up of all the single men,—  
 In such a synthesis the labour ends.  
 Now mark me! those divine men of old time 95  
 Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one point  
 The outside verge that rounds our faculty;  
 And where they reached, who can do more than reach?  
 It takes but little water just to touch  
 At some one point the inside of a sphere, 100  
 And, as we turn the sphere, touch all the rest  
 In due succession: but the finer air  
 Which not so palpably nor obviously,  
 Though no less universally, can touch  
 The whole circumference of that emptied sphere, 105  
 Fills it more fully than the water did;  
 Holds thrice the weight of water in itself  
 Resolved into a subtler element.

And yet the vulgar call the sphere first full  
 Up to the visible height—and after, void; 110  
 Not knowing air's more hidden properties.  
 And thus our soul, misknown, cries out to Zeus  
 To vindicate his purpose in our life:  
 Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?  
 Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out, 115  
 That he or other god descended here  
 And, once for all, showed simultaneously  
 What, in its nature, never can be shown,  
 Piecemeal or in succession;—showed, I say,  
 The worth both absolute and relative 120  
 Of all his children from the birth of time,  
 His instruments for all appointed work.  
 I now go on to image,—might we hear  
 The judgment which should give the due to each,  
 Show where the labour lay and where the ease, 125  
 And prove Zeus' self, the latent everywhere!  
 This is a dream:—but no dream, let us hope,  
 That years and days, the summers and the springs,  
 Follow each other with unwaning powers.  
 The grapes which dye thy wine are richer far, 130  
 Through culture, than the wild wealth of the rock;  
 The suave plum than the savage-tasted drupe;  
 The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet;  
 The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn flowers;  
 That young and tender crescent-moon, thy slave, 135  
 Sleeping above her robe as buoyed by clouds,  
 Refines upon the women of my youth.  
 What, and the soul alone deteriorates?  
 I have not chanted verse like Homer, no—  
 Nor swept string like Terpander, no—nor carved 140  
 And painted men like Phidias and his friend:  
 I am not great as they are, point by point.  
 But I have entered into sympathy

140. *Terpander*: founder of Greek music, who lived in the seventh century B.C.

141. *Polygnotus*, the painter, was reputed to be the teacher of the great sculptor *Phidias*. They lived in the fifth century B.C., during the *Periclean Age*, the greatest period of Athenian art and statesmanship. Browning's own faith in Progress led him, like *Cleon*, to deny superior greatness to past achievement.

With these four, running these into one soul,  
 Who, separate, ignored each other's art. 145  
 Say, is it nothing that I know them all?  
 The wild flower was the larger; I have dashed  
 Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's  
 Honey with wine, and driven its seed to fruit,  
 And show a better flower if not so large: 150  
 I stand myself. Refer this to the gods  
 Whose gift alone it is! which, shall I dare  
 (All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext  
 That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,  
 Discourse of lightly or depreciate? 155  
 It might have fallen to another's hand: what then?  
 I pass too surely: let at least truth stay!

And next, of what thou followest on to ask.  
 This being with me as I declare, O king,  
 My works, in all these varicoloured kinds, 160  
 So done by me, accepted so by men—  
 Thou askest, if (my soul thus in men's hearts)  
 I must not be accounted to attain  
 The very crown and proper end of life?  
 Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up, 165  
 I face death with success in my right hand:  
 Whether I fear death less than dost thyself  
 The fortunate of men? "For" (writest thou)  
 "Thou leavest much behind, while I leave nought.  
 Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing, 170  
 The pictures men shall study; while my life,  
 Complete and whole now in its power and joy,  
 Dies altogether with my brain and arm,  
 Is lost indeed; since, what survives myself?  
 The brazen statue to o'erlook my grave, 175  
 Set on the promontory which I named.  
 And that—some supple courtier of my heir  
 Shall use its robed and sceptred arm, perhaps,  
 To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.  
 I go then: triumph thou, who dost not go!" 180

Nay, thou art worthy of hearing my whole mind.  
 Is this apparent, when thou turn'st to muse

Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief,  
 That admiration grows as knowledge grows?  
 That imperfection means perfection hid, 185  
 Reserved in part, to grace the after-time?  
 If, in the morning of philosophy,  
 Ere aught had been recorded, nay perceived,  
 Thou, with the light now in thee, couldst have looked  
 On all earth's tenantry, from worm to bird, 190  
 Ere man, her last, appeared upon the stage—  
 Thou wouldst have seen them perfect, and deduced  
 The perfectness of others yet unseen.  
 Conceding which,—had Zeus then questioned thee  
 "Shall I go on a step, improve on this, 195  
 Do more for visible creatures than is done?"  
 Thou wouldst have answered, "Ay, by making each  
 Grow conscious in himself—by that alone.  
 All 's perfect else: the shell sucks fast the rock,  
 The fish strikes through the sea, the snake both swims 200  
 And slides, forth range the beasts, the birds take flight,  
 Till life's mechanics can no further go—  
 And all this joy in natural life is put  
 Like fire from off thy finger into each,  
 So exquisitely perfect is the same. 205  
 But 't is pure fire, and they mere matter are;  
 It has them, not they it: and so I choose  
 For man, thy last premeditated work  
 (If I might add a glory to the scheme)  
 That a third thing should stand apart from both, 210  
 A quality arise within his soul,  
 Which, intro-active, made to supervise  
 And feel the force it has, may view itself,  
 And so be happy." Man might live at first  
 The animal life: but is there nothing more? 215  
 In due time, let him critically learn  
 How he lives; and, the more he gets to know  
 Of his own life's adaptabilities,  
 The more joy-giving will his life become.  
 Thus man, who hath this quality, is best. 220

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably said:  
 "Let progress end at once,—man make no step

Beyond the natural man, the better beast,  
Using his senses, not the sense of sense."  
In man there 's failure, only since he left 225  
The lower and unconscious forms of life.  
We called it an advance, the rendering plain  
Man's spirit might grow conscious of man's life,  
And, by new lore so added to the old,  
Take each step higher over the brute's head. 230  
This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,  
Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the soul,  
Which whole surrounding flats of natural life  
Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to;  
A tower that crowns a country. But alas, 235  
The soul now climbs it just to perish there!  
For thence we have discovered ('t is no dream—  
We know this, which we had not else perceived)  
That there 's a world of capability  
For joy, spread round about us, meant for us, 240  
Inviting us; and still the soul craves all,  
And still the flesh replies, "Take no jot more  
Than ere thou clombst the tower to look abroad!  
Nay, so much less as that fatigue has brought  
Deduction to it." We struggle, fain to enlarge 245  
Our bounded physical reciprocity,  
Increase our power, supply fresh oil to life,  
Repair the waste of age and sickness: no,  
It skills not! life 's inadequate to joy,  
As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take. 250  
They praise a fountain in my garden here  
Wherein a Naiad sends the water-bow  
Thin from her tube; she smiles to see it rise.  
What if I told her, it is just a thread  
From that great river which the hills shut up, 255  
And mock her with my leave to take the same?  
The artificer has given her one small tube  
Past power to widen or exchange—what boots  
To know she might spout oceans if she could?  
She cannot lift beyond her first thin thread: 260  
And so a man can use but a man's joy  
While he sees God's. Is it for Zeus to boast,  
"See, man, how happy I live, and despair—

That I may be still happier—for thy use!"  
 If this were so, we could not thank our lord, 265  
 As hearts beat on to doing: 't is not so—  
 Malice it is not. Is it carelessness?  
 Still, no. If care—where is the sign? I ask,  
 And get no answer, and agree in sum,  
 O king, with thy profound discouragement, 270  
 Who seest the wider but to sigh the more.  
 Most progress is most failure: thou sayest well.

The last point now:—thou dost except a case—  
 Holding joy not impossible to one  
 With artist-gifts—to such a man as I 275  
 Who leave behind me living works indeed;  
 For, such a poem, such a painting lives.  
 What? dost thou verily trip upon a word,  
 Confound the accurate view of what joy is  
 (Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than thine) 280  
 With feeling joy? confound the knowing how  
 And showing how to live (my faculty)  
 With actually living?—Otherwise  
 Where is the artist's vantage o'er the king?  
 Because in my great epos I display 285  
 How divers men young, strong, fair, wise, can act—  
 Is this as though I acted? if I paint,  
 Carve the young Phœbus, am I therefore young?  
 Methinks I 'm older that I bowed myself  
 The many years of pain that taught me art! 290  
 Indeed, to know is something, and to prove  
 How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more:  
 But, knowing nought, to enjoy is something too.  
 Yon rower, with the moulded muscles there,  
 Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I. 295  
 I can write love-odes: thy fair slave 's an ode.  
 I get to sing of love, when grown too grey  
 For being beloved: she turns to that young man,  
 The muscles all a-ripple on his back.  
 I know the joy of kingship: well, thou art king! 300

"But," sayest thou—(and I marvel, I repeat,  
 To find thee trip on such a mere word) "what

Thou writest, paintest, stays; that does not die:  
 Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,  
 And Æschylus, because we read his plays!" 305  
 Why, if they live still, let them come and take  
 Thy slave in my despite, drink from thy cup,  
 Speak in my place. Thou diest while I survive?  
 Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,  
 In this, that every day my sense of joy 310  
 Grows more acute, my soul (intensified  
 By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen;  
 While every day my hairs fall more and more,  
 My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase—  
 The horror quickening still from year to year, 315  
 The consummation coming past escape  
 When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy—  
 When all my works wherein I prove my worth,  
 Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,  
 Alive still, in the praise of such as thou, 320  
 I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,  
 The man who loved his life so over-much,  
 Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,  
 I dare at times imagine to my need  
 Some future state revealed to us by Zeus, 325  
 Unlimited in capability  
 For joy, as this is in desire for joy,  
 —To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us:  
 That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait  
 On purpose to make prized the life at large— 330  
 Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,  
 We burst there as the worm into the fly,  
 Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But no!  
 Zeus has not yet revealed it; and alas,  
 He must have done so, were it possible! 335

Live long and happy, and in that thought die:  
 Glad for what was! Farewell. And for the rest,  
 I cannot tell thy messenger aright  
 Where to deliver what he bears of thine  
 To one called Paulus; we have heard his fame 340

Indeed, if Christus be not one with him—  
 I know not, nor am troubled much to know.  
 Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew  
 As Paulus proves to be, one circumsized,  
 Hath access to a secret shut from us? 345  
 Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,  
 In stooping to inquire of such an one,  
 As if his answer could impose at all!  
 He writeth, doth he? well, and he may write.  
 Oh, the Jew findeth scholars! certain slaves 350  
 Who touched on this same isle, preached him and Christ;  
 And (as I gathered from a bystander)  
 Their doctrine could be held by no sane man.

## POPULARITY\*

## I

STAND still, true poet that you are!  
 I know you; let me try and draw you.  
 Some night you 'll fail us: when afar  
 You rise, remember one man saw you,  
 Knew you, and named a star! 5

## II

My star, God's glow-worm! Why extend  
 That loving hand of his which leads you,  
 Yet locks you safe from end to end  
 Of this dark world, unless he needs you,  
 Just saves your light to spend? 10

## III

His clenched hand shall uncloze at last,  
 I know, and let out all the beauty:  
 My poet holds the future fast,  
 Accepts the coming ages' duty,  
 Their present for this past. 15

341. *Christus*: Christ.

\* Browning contrasts the neglect that Keats suffered with the rewards won by those who later exploited the vein of poetry opened up by Keats. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Perhaps Browning drew the figure of speech that runs through the poem from Keats' sonnet beginning "Blue! 'T is the life of heaven."



## IV

That day, the earth's feast-master's brow  
 Shall clear, to God the chalice raising;  
 "Others give best at first, but thou  
 Forever set'st our table praising,  
 Keep'st the good wine till now!" 20

## V

Meantime, I 'll draw you as you stand,  
 With few or none to watch and wonder:  
 I 'll say—a fisher, on the sand  
 By Tyre the old, with ocean-plunder,  
 A netful, brought to land. 25

## VI

Who has not heard how Tyrian shells  
 Enclosed the blue, that dye of dyes  
 Whereof one drop worked miracles,  
 And coloured like Astarte's eyes  
 Raw silk the merchant sells? 30

## VII

And each bystander of them all  
 Could criticize, and quote tradition  
 How depths of blue sublimed some pall  
 —To get which, pricked a king's ambition;  
 Worth sceptre, crown and ball. 35

## VIII

Yet there 's the dye, in that rough mesh,  
 The sea has only just o'erwhispered!  
 Live whelks, each lip's beard dripping fresh,  
 As if they still the water's lisp heard  
 Through foam the rock-weeds thresh. 40

18-20. Reference to John, ii, 1-10.

24. *Tyre*: Phoenician city from which came the Tyrian purple (or blue) dye that was the sign of royalty. See note to line 64.

29. *Astarte*: Semitic goddess identified with Aphrodite or Artemis.

## IX

Enough to furnish Solomon  
 Such hangings for his cedar-house,  
 That, when gold-robed he took the throne  
 In that abyss of blue, the Spouse  
 Might swear his presence shone 45

## X

Most like the centre-spike of gold  
 Which burns deep in the blue-bell's womb,  
 What time, with ardours manifold,  
 The bee goes singing to her groom,  
 Drunken and overbold. 50

## XI

Mere conchs! not fit for warp or woof!  
 Till cunning come to pound and squeeze  
 And clarify,—refine to proof  
 The liquor filtered by degrees,  
 While the world stands aloof. 55

## XII

And there 's the extract, flasked and fine,  
 And priced and saleable at last!  
 And Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Nokes combine  
 To paint the future from the past,  
 Put blue into their line. 60

## XIII

Hobbs hints blue,—straight he turtle eats:  
 Nobbs prints blue,—claret crowns his cup:  
 Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats,—  
 Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?  
 What porridge had John Keats? 65

---

41 ff. See 1 Kings, vi-vii.

51. *Conchs*: shells.

58. Imaginary names for a company of merchants that bottle, sell, and take the pay for the product won at great labor by the ill-paid fisherman.

61. He eats turtle like a prosperous merchant.

64. *Murex*: the mollusk from which the dye is made.

65. *Porridge*: i.e., reward.



What he bought of Emperor Aldabrod,  
 He sold it to Sultan Saladin:  
 Till, caught by Pope Clement, a-buzzing there,  
 Hornet-prince of the mad wasps' hive, 15  
 And clipt of his wings in Paris square,  
 They bring him now to be burned alive.  
 [*And wanteth there grace of lute or clavicithern,*  
*ye shall say to confirm him who singeth—*  
 We bring John now to be burned alive.

## III

In the midst is a goodly gallows built;  
 'Twixt fork and fork, a stake is stuck; 20  
 But first they set divers tumbrils a-tilt,  
 Make a trench all round with the city muck;  
 Inside they pile log upon log, good store;  
 Faggots no few, blocks great and small,  
 Reach a man's mid-thigh, no less, no more,— 25  
 For they mean he should roast in the sight of all.

## CHORUS

We mean he should roast in the sight of all.

## IV

Good sappy bavins that kindle forthwith;  
 Billets that blaze substantial and slow;  
 Pine-stump split deftly, dry as pith; 30  
 Larch-heart that chars to a chalk-white glow:  
 Then up they hoist me John in a chafe,  
 Sling him fast like a hog to scorch,  
 Spit in his face, then leap back safe,  
 Sing "Laudes" and bid clap-to the torch. 35

## CHORUS

*Laus Deo*—who bids clap-to the torch.

12-14. Pope Clement V (1303-1314), who suppressed the Templars, made it a charge against de Molay that they had sold their gains to the enemy, Sultan Saladin.

17-18. *Clavicithern*: a cithern with keys like a clavichord.

28. *Bavins*: bundles of brushwood.

29. *Billets*: sticks of firewood.

35. *Laudes*: a service of the Church, including the Psalms of praise.

## V

John of the Temple, whose fame so bragged,  
 Is burning alive in Paris square!  
 How can he curse, if his mouth is gagged?  
 Or wriggle his neck, with a collar there? 40  
 Or heave his chest, which a band goes round?  
 Or threat with his fist, since his arms are spliced?  
 Or kick with his feet, now his legs are bound?  
 —Thinks John, I will call upon Jesus Christ.  
     *[Here one crosseth himself.]*

## VI

Jesus Christ—John had bought and sold, 45  
 Jesus Christ—John had eaten and drunk;  
 To him, the Flesh meant silver and gold.  
     *(Salvâ reverentiâ.)*  
 Now it was, "Saviour, bountiful lamb,  
 I have roasted thee Turks, though men roast me! 50  
 See thy servant, the plight wherein I am!  
 Art thou a saviour? Save thou me!"

## CHORUS

'T is John the mocker cries, "Save thou me!"

## VII

Who maketh God's menace an idle word?  
 —Saith, it no more means what it proclaims, 55  
 Than a damsel's threat to her wanton bird?—  
 For she too prattles of ugly names.  
 —Saith, he knoweth but one thing,—what he knows?  
 That God is good and the rest is breath;  
 Why else is the same styled Sharon's rose? 60  
 Once a rose, ever a rose, he saith.

## CHORUS

O, John shall yet find a rose, he saith!

48. *Salvâ reverentiâ*: "greet with a reverence" (since the Flesh, or Host, of the Sacrament has just been mentioned).

60. *Sharon's rose*: in Song of Solomon, ii, 1.

## VIII

Alack, there be roses and roses, John!  
 Some, honied of taste like your leman's tongue:  
 Some, bitter; for why? (roast gaily on!) 65  
 Their tree struck root in devil's-dung.  
 When Paul once reasoned of righteousness  
 And of temperance and of judgment to come,  
 Good Felix trembled, he could no less:  
 John, snickering, crook'd his wicked thumb. 70

## CHORUS

What cometh to John of the wicked thumb?

## IX

Ha ha, John plucketh now at his rose  
 To rid himself of a sorrow at heart!  
 Lo,—petal on petal, fierce rays uncloset;  
 Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart; 75  
 And with blood for dew, the bosom boils;  
 And a gust of sulphur is all its smell;  
 And lo, he is horribly in the toils  
 Of a coal-black giant flower of hell!

## CHORUS

What maketh heaven, That maketh hell. 80

## X

So, as John called now, through the fire amain,  
 On the Name, he had cursed with, all his life—  
 To the Person, he bought and sold again—  
 For the Face, with his daily buffets rife—  
 Feature by feature It took its place: 85  
 And his voice, like a mad dog's choking bark,  
 At the steady whole of the Judge's face—  
 Died. Forth John's soul flared into the dark.

## SUBJOINETH THE ABBOT DEODAET

God help all poor souls lost in the dark!

64. *Leman*: sweetheart.

69. *Felix*: Procurator of Judea; see Acts, xxiv.

## TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA\*

## I

I WONDER do you feel to-day  
 As I have felt since, hand in hand,  
 We sat down on the grass, to stray  
 In spirit better through the land,  
 This morn of Rome and May? 5

## II

For me, I touched a thought, I know,  
 Has tantalized me many times,  
 (Like turns of thread the spiders throw  
 Mocking across our path) for rhymes  
 To catch at and let go. 10

## III

Help me to hold it! First it left  
 The yellowing fennel, run to seed  
 There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,  
 Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed  
 Took up the floating weft, 15

## IV

Where one small orange cup amassed  
 Five beetles,—blind and green they grope  
 Among the honey-meal: and last,  
 Everywhere on the grassy slope  
 I traced it. Hold it fast! 20

## V

The champaign with its endless fleece  
 Of feathery grasses everywhere!  
 Silence and passion, joy and peace,  
 An everlasting wash of air—  
 Rome's ghost since her decease. 25

\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). The Campagna (ancient Latium) is the plain around Rome, providing, with its ruins and its rich pastures, a very appropriate setting for this mood of melancholy over the sense that love is as elusive as a spider web.

21. *Champaign*: the Campagna.

## VI

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,  
Such miracles performed in play,  
Such primal naked forms of flowers,  
Such letting nature have her way  
While heaven looks from its towers! 30

## VII

How say you? Let us, O my dove,  
Let us be unashamed of soul,  
As earth lies bare to heaven above!  
How is it under our control  
To love or not to love? 35

## VIII

I would that you were all to me,  
You that are just so much, no more.  
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!  
Where does the fault lie? What the core  
O' the wound, since wound must be? 40

## IX

I would I could adopt your will,  
See with your eyes, and set my heart  
Beating by yours, and drink my fill  
At your soul's springs,—your part my part  
In life, for good and ill. 45

## X

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,  
Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,  
Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose  
And love it more than tongue can speak—  
Then the good minute goes. 50

## XI

Already how am I so far  
Out of that minute? Must I go  
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,  
Onward, whenever light winds blow,  
Fixed by no friendly star? 55



## XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!  
 Where is the thread now? Off again!  
 The old trick! Only I discern—  
 Infinite passion, and the pain  
 Of finite hearts that yearn.

60

## A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

SHORTLY AFTER THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING IN EUROPE.\*

LET us begin and carry up this corpse,  
 Singing together.  
 Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes  
 Each in its tether  
 Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain, 5  
 Cared-for till cock-crow:  
 Look out if yonder be not day again  
 Rimming the rock-row!  
 That 's the appropriate country; there, man's thought,  
 Rarer, intenser, 10  
 Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,  
 Chafes in the censer.

\*This is a realistic elegy on the death of a typical scholar ("grammarian") who has devoted his life to minute linguistic research and values learning for learning's own sake. The poet has laid it in the time of the Renaissance, when the recovery of knowledge of Greek and Latin literature was the necessary means of restoring contact with the classical view of life, human and rational in its emphasis. This "grammarian" however does not apply his learning to human purposes in the spirit of the Renaissance; in his devotion to facts for their own sake he is perhaps more like a type of scholar that flourished in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Browning himself admires the decision "not to Live"—this willingness to forego everything except study. In his glorification of specialization and his "philosophy of the imperfect," Browning was hostile to the classic demand for balanced and well-rounded perfection, and preferred an attitude that he was calling Medieval in other poems that appeared in 1855 in the same work, *Men and Women* (e.g. "Old Pictures in Florence"). John Ruskin also ascribed that philosophy to the Middle Ages in *The Stones of Venice* (1853), which Browning had been reading in 1854. The scholar is therefore not of one age but of any. As the master's disciples carry his body up the mountain, the rhythm of their step is very successfully reflected in the meter of the verse.

3. *Crofts*: enclosed fields; *thorpes*: villages.

Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;  
     Seek we sepulture  
 On a tall mountain, citied to the top, 15  
     Crowded with culture!  
 All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;  
     Clouds overcome it;  
 No! yonder sparkle is the citadel's  
     Circling its summit. 20  
 Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights:  
     Wait ye the warning?  
 Our low life was the level's and the night's;  
     He 's for the morning.  
 Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head, 25  
     'Ware the beholders!  
 This is our master, famous calm and dead,  
     Borne on our shoulders.

Sleep, crop and herd! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,  
     Safe from the weather! 30  
 He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,  
     Singing together,  
 He was a man born with thy face and throat,  
     Lyric Apollo!  
 Long he lived nameless: how should spring take note 35  
     Winter would follow?  
 Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!  
     Cramped and diminished,  
 Moaned he, "New measures, other feet anon!  
     My dance is finished?" 40  
 No, that 's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,  
     Make for the city!)  
 He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride  
     Over men's pity;  
 Left play for work, and grappled with the world 45  
     Bent on escaping:  
 "What 's in the scroll," quoth he, "thou keepest furled?  
     Show me their shaping,  
 Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,—  
     Give!"—So, he gowned him, 50

---

50. *Gowned him*: put on a gown, symbol of academic life.

Straight got by heart that book to its last page:  
     Learned, we found him.  
 Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,  
     Accents uncertain:  
 "Time to taste life," another would have said, 55  
     "Up with the curtain!"  
 This man said rather, "Actual life comes next?  
     Patience a moment!  
 Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,  
     Still there 's the comment. 60  
 Let me know all! Prate not of most or least,  
     Painful or easy!  
 Even to the crumbs I 'd fain eat up the feast,  
     Ay, nor feel queasy."  
 Oh, such a life as he resolved to live, 65  
     When he had learned it,  
 When he had gathered all books had to give!  
     Sooner, he spurned it.  
 Image the whole, then execute the parts—  
     Fancy the fabric 70  
 Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,  
     Ere mortar dab brick!  
  
 (Here 's the town-gate reached: there 's the market-place  
     Gaping before us.)  
 Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace 75  
     (Hearten our chorus!)  
 That before living he 'd learn how to live—  
     No end to learning:  
 Earn the means first—God surely will contrive  
     Use for our earning. 80  
 Others mistrust and say, "But time escapes:  
     Live now or never!"  
 He said, "What 's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!  
     Man has Forever."  
 Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head: 85  
     *Calculus* racked him:

81-3. Cf. "Old Pictures in Florence," 120 and 152.

84. Cf. the conception of Heaven expressed in "Evelyn Hope," "Andrea del Sarto," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," etc. Browning wishes to encourage even ambitions that cannot be attained on earth.

86. *Calculus*: the stone.

Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead:  
*Tussis* attacked him.  
 "Now, master, take a little rest!"—not he!  
 (Caution redoubled, 90  
 Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!)  
 Not a whit troubled  
 Back to his studies, fresher than at first,  
 Fierce as a dragon  
 He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst) 95  
 Sucked at the flagon.  
 Oh, if we draw a circle premature,  
 Heedless of far gain,  
 Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure  
 Bad is our bargain! 100  
 Was it not great? did not he throw on God,  
 (He loves the burthen)—  
 God's task to make the heavenly period  
 Perfect the earthen?  
 Did not he magnify the mind, show clear 105  
 Just what it all meant?  
 He would not discount life, as fools do here,  
 Paid by instalment!  
 He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success  
 Found, or earth's failure: 110  
 "Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered "Yes:  
 Hence with life's pale lure!"  
 That low man seeks a little thing to do,  
 Sees it and does it:  
 This high man, with a great thing to pursue, 115  
 Dies ere he knows it.  
 That low man goes on adding one to one,  
 His hundred 's soon hit:  
 This high man, aiming at a million,  
 Misses an unit. 120  
 That, has the world here—should he need the next,  
 Let the world mind him!  
 This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed  
 Seeking shall find him.

88. *Tussis*: a cough.

95. *Hydroptic*: over-thirsty.

97 ff. Cf. "Abt Vogler," line 72.

So, with the throttling hands of death at strife, 125  
     Ground he at grammar;  
 Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife:  
     While he could stammer  
 He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be!—  
     Properly based *Oun*— 130  
 Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,  
     Dead from the waist down.  
 Well, here 's the platform, here 's the proper place:  
     Hail to your purlieus,  
 All ye highfliers of the feathered race, 135  
     Swallows and curlews!  
 Here 's the top-peak; the multitude below  
     Live, for they can, there:  
 This man decided not to Live but Know—  
     Bury this man there? 140  
 Here—here 's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,  
     Lightnings are loosened,  
 Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,  
     Peace let the dew send!  
 Lofty designs must close in like effects: 145  
     Loftily lying,  
 Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,  
     Living and dying.

127. *Rattle*: of death.

129-131. *Hoti, Oun, De*: Greek particles meaning "that," "therefore," "towards."

139. Contrast the characteristic attitude of the Renaissance, as expressed by Montaigne in *Of Pedantry* and *Of the Education of Children*, or in the words of Sir Philip Sidney on "The highest end of the mistress Knowledge . . . which stands . . . in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well doing and not of well knowing only" (*Apology for Poetry*).

141-3. Browning did not really approve of dangerous scholarship as is shown in "Christmas Eve," XVIII, where he regrets that learning has left Grammar to study the Bible. He would not tolerate the kind of scholarship the Renaissance most admired, that of a man like Erasmus, whose learning had revolutionary consequences.

## ONE WAY OF LOVE\*

## I

ALL June I bound the rose in sheaves.  
 Now, rose by rose, I strip the leaves  
 And strew them where Pauline may pass.  
 She will not turn aside? Alas!  
 Let them lie. Suppose they die? 5  
 The chance was they might take her eye.

## II

How many a month I strove to suit  
 These stubborn fingers to the lute!  
 To-day I venture all I know.  
 She will not hear my music? So! 10  
 Break the string; fold music's wing:  
 Suppose Pauline had bade me sing!

## III

My whole life long I learned to love.  
 This hour my utmost art I prove  
 And speak my passion—heaven or hell? 15  
 She will not give me heaven? 'T is well!  
 Lose who may—I still can say,  
 Those who win heaven, blest are they!

## ANOTHER WAY OF LOVE\*\*

## I

JUNE was not over,  
 Though past the full,  
 And the best of her roses  
 Had yet to blow,  
 When a man I know 5

\* Published in *Men and Women* (1855), with "Another Way of Love" to which it is contrasted by exhibiting the attitude of patience. In the final edition of Browning's poetry this was printed immediately after "A Serenade at the Villa" to which it is very similar in mood and situation.

\*\* Sequel to "One Way of Love" and published with it in *Men and Women* (1855). Both are poems of June roses. The woman compares her perfections to those of June, and speaks scornfully of the man who could tire of them merely because they are always the same. She threatens to give herself to one who will appreciate "redness and sweetness." Or she may strike with the June-lightning of her scorn such insects as men.

(But shall not discover,  
 Since ears are dull,  
 And time discloses)  
 Turned him and said with a man's true air,  
 Half sighing a smile in a yawn, as 't were,— 10  
 "If I tire of your June, will she greatly care?"

## II

Well, dear, in-doors with you!  
 True! serene deadness  
 Tries a man's temper.  
 What 's in the blossom 15  
 June wears on her bosom?  
 Can it clear scores with you?  
 Sweetness and redness.  
*Eadem semper!*  
 Go, let me care for it greatly or slightly! 20  
 If June mend her bower now, your hand left unsightly  
 By plucking the roses,—my June will do rightly.

## III

And after, for pastime,  
 If June be refulgent  
 With flowers in completeness, 25  
 All petals, no prickles,  
 Delicious as trickles  
 Of wine poured at mass-time,—  
 And choose One indulgent  
 To redness and sweetness: 30  
 Or if, with experience of man and of spider,  
 June use my June-lightning, the strong insect-ridder,  
 And stop the fresh film-work,—why, June will consider.

"TRANSCENDENTALISM: A POEM IN  
 TWELVE BOOKS."\*

Stop playing, poet! May a brother speak?  
 'T is you speak, that 's your error. Song 's our art:  
 Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts

19. *Eadem semper*: "always the same."

\* The title is in quotation marks, as if it were the title of some other poet's work on which Browning is commenting. Cooke's *Guide-Book* says

Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.  
 —True thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts fit to treasure up! 5  
 But why such long prolusion and display,  
 Such turning and adjustment of the harp,  
 And taking it upon your breast, at length,  
 Only to speak dry words across its strings?  
 Stark-naked thought is in request enough: 10  
 Speak prose and hollo it till Europe hears!  
 The six-foot Swiss tube, braced about with bark,  
 Which helps the hunter's voice from Alp to Alp—  
 Exchange our harp for that,—who hinders you?

But here 's your fault; grown men want thought, you think; 15  
 Thought 's what they mean by verse, and seek in verse.  
 Boys seek for images and melody,  
 Men must have reason—so, you aim at men.  
 Quite otherwise! Objects throng our youth, 't is true;  
 We see and hear and do not wonder much: 20  
 If you could tell us what they mean, indeed!  
 As German Boehme never cared for plants  
 Until it happed, a-walking in the fields,  
 He noticed all at once that plants could speak,  
 Nay, turned with loosened tongue to talk with him. 25  
 That day the daisy had an eye indeed—  
 Colloquized with the cowslip on such themes!

---

that here Browning "speaks to a young realistic poet, who is writing a poem in twelve books on transcendentalism, and advises him not to make his song too naked, in its attempt to describe life as it is." DeVane in his *Handbook* suggests that perhaps this is a reply to Carlyle's advice to poets to say in prose what they had to say. Carlyle was a transcendentalist. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Browning's later verse is often guilty of the faults here condemned.

22. Jacob Boehme was a German mystic (1575-1624). Two years before the publication of this poem, Mrs. Browning and some of their friends became interested in Swedenborg, a follower of Boehme, who was himself a follower of Paracelsus (the subject of Browning's second published poem). Boehme saw hidden meanings in all nature. One day the sunshine on a burnished pewter dish shone with such splendor that he fell into an ecstacy, and felt that he could look into the principles of things. Thinking this to be a mere fancy, "in order to banish it from his mind he went out upon the green. But here he remarked that he gazed into the very heart of things, the very herbs and grass" (Martensen, *Jacob Boehme*, tr. T. Rhys Evans, London, 1885, p. 7).



We find them extant yet in Jacob's prose.  
 But by the time youth slips a stage or two  
 While reading prose in that tough book he wrote 30  
 (Collating and emendating the same  
 And settling on the sense most to our mind),  
 We shut the clasps and find life's summer past.  
 Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss—  
 Another Boehme with a tougher book 35  
 And subtler meanings of what roses say,—  
 Or some stout Mage like him of Halberstadt,  
 John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts about?  
 He with a "look you!" vents a brace of rhymes,  
 And in there breaks the sudden rose herself, 40  
 Over us, under, round us every side,  
 Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs  
 And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all,—  
 Buries us with a glory, young once more,  
 Pouring heaven into this shut house of life. 45

So come, the harp back to your heart again!  
 You are a poem, though your poem's naught.  
 The best of all you showed before, believe,  
 Was your own boy-face o'er the finer chords  
 Bent, following the cherub at the top 50  
 That points to God with his paired half-moon wings.

## ONE WORD MORE

TO E. B. B.\*

1855

I

THERE they are, my fifty men and women  
 Naming me the fifty poems finished!

37. Johannes Teutonicus, a canon of Halberstadt, was a magician said to be able to make flowers spring up in winter—as a poet creates beauty.

\* Browning dedicates *Men and Women* (1855) to his wife, "E.B.B.," with this epilogue. It is the reply to her poetic expression of her love for him in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850).

1-2. *Men and Women* contained fifty poems besides this epilogue, and the rest of the book was "finished" and in the hands of the printer before this poem was added.

Take them, Love, the book and me together:  
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

## II

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Rafael made a century of sonnets,                | 5  |
| Made and wrote them in a certain volume          |    |
| Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil            |    |
| Else he only used to draw Madonnas:              |    |
| These, the world might view—but one, the volume. |    |
| Who that one, you ask? Your heart instructs you. | 10 |
| Did she live and love it all her life-time?      |    |
| Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,           |    |
| Die, and let it drop beside her pillow           |    |
| Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,         |    |
| Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving—         | 15 |
| Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's    |    |
| Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's?    |    |

## III

|  |    |
|--|----|
| You and I would rather read that volume,     |    |
| (Taken to his beating bosom by it)           |    |
| Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,     | 20 |
| Would we not? than wonder at Madonnas—       |    |
| Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno       |    |
| Her, that visits Florence in a vision,       |    |
| Her, that 's left with lilies in the Louvre— |    |
| Seen by us and all the world in circle.      | 25 |

## IV

You and I will never read that volume.  
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple  
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.

5. Vasari is responsible for the story that Raphael, the great Renaissance painter, wrote a hundred sonnets to a young girl he loved all his life. Only four sonnets are known to have been composed by him.

21-22. The Sistine Madonna and the Madonna of Foligno are two of the most famous of Raphael's fifty or more Madonnas.

23. Browning wrote to W. J. Rolfe, "The Madonna at Florence is that called *del Granduca*, which represents her 'as appearing to a votary in a vision.'" It is in the Pitti Palace.

24. Browning said, "I think I mean *La Belle Jardinière*—but am not sure—from the picture in the Louvre."

27. Guido Reni (1575-1642), an Italian painter, treasured a book of Raphael's original designs—not sonnets, as Browning implies.

Guido Reni dying, all Bologna  
 Cried, and the world cried too, "Ours, the treasure!" 30  
 Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

## V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:  
 Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice."  
 While he mused and traced it and retraced it,  
 (Peradventure with a pen corroded 35  
 Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,  
 When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,  
 Back he held the brown and pricked its stigma,  
 Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,  
 Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle, 40  
 Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—  
 Dante, who loved well because he hated,  
 Hated wickedness that hinders loving,  
 Dante standing, studying his angel,—  
 In there broke the folk of his Inferno. 45  
 Says he—"Certain people of importance"  
 (Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)  
 "Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."  
 Says the poet—"Then I stopped my painting."

## VI

You and I would rather see that angel, 50  
 Painted by the tenderness of Dante,  
 Would we not?—than read a fresh Inferno.

---

32. Dante, the greatest poet of the Middle Ages, expresses his devotion to Beatrice Portinari in both *The Divine Comedy* and *The New Life*, where he writes (ch. XXXV) that on the first anniversary of her death, "having her in mind, I was drawing an angel upon my tablets, . . . I turned my eyes and saw at my side certain people of importance." Boccaccio says that Dante had studied drawing under Cimabue and was "very intimate with Giotto," and Aretino says, "Dante was an excellent draughtsman."

35-36. *Pen corroded*: by the writing of the first part of *The Divine Comedy*, "The Inferno," where he showed his Florentine enemies tortured in Hell.

44. So for Browning this poem differs from the rest of the portraits of *Men and Women* by being a study of "his angel."

48. There is no basis for this statement in Dante's *New Life*. The passage quoted above ends, "And when they had gone away, I returned to my work, that is, that of drawing figures of angels."

## VII

You and I will never see that picture.  
 While he mused on love and Beatrice,  
 While he softened o'er his outlined angel, 55  
 In they broke, those "people of importance:"  
 We and Bice bear the loss for ever.

## VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?  
 This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not  
 Once, and only once, and for one only, 60  
 (Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language  
 Fit and fair and simple and sufficient—  
 Using nature that 's an art to others,  
 Not, this one time, art that 's turned his nature.  
 Ay, of all the artists living, loving, 65  
 None but would forego his proper dowry,—  
 Does he paint? he fain would write a poem,—  
 Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,  
 Put to proof art alien to the artist's,  
 Once, and only once, and for one only, 70  
 So to be the man and leave the artist,  
 Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

## IX

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!  
 He who smites the rock and spreads the water,  
 Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him, 75  
 Even he, the minute makes immortal,  
 Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,  
 Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.  
 While he smites, how can he but remember,  
 So he smote before, in such a peril, 80  
 When they stood and mocked—"Shall smiting help us?"  
 When they drank and sneered—"A stroke is easy!"  
 When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,  
 Throwing him for thanks—"But drought was pleasant."  
 Thus old memories mar the actual triumph; 85  
 Thus the doing savours of disrelish;  
 Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;

57. *Bice*: Beatrice.

74. *Moses*. (See Exodus, xvi-xix; Numbers, xii and xx.)

O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,  
 Carelessness or consciousness—the gesture.  
 For he bears an ancient wrong about him, 90  
 Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,  
 Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude—  
 "How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"  
 Guesses what is like to prove the sequel—  
 "Egypt's flesh-pots—nay, the drought was better." 95

## X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!  
 Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,  
 Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.  
 Never dares the man put off the propheth.

## XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands, 100  
 (Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,  
 Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)  
 He would envy yon dumb patient camel,  
 Keeping a reserve of scanty water  
 Meant to save his own life in the desert; 105  
 Ready in the desert to deliver  
 (Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)  
 Hoard and life together for his mistress.

## XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,  
 Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues, 110  
 Make you music that should all-express me;  
 So it seems: I stand on my attainment.  
 This of verse alone, one life allows me;  
 Verse and nothing else have I to give you.  
 Other heights in other lives, God willing: 115  
 All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

95. See Exodus, xvi, 3.

97. *Sinai . . . brilliance*: God appearing amid lightning on Mt. Sinai.  
 See Exodus, xix and xxxiv.

101. *Jethro's daughter*: Zipporah, wife of Moses. See Exodus, ii and xviii.

102. *Æthiopian bondslave*: See Numbers, xii.

115. Here Browning himself endorses the view expressed in "Evelyn Hope" that there may be several afterlives. As that hope was for the

## XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us—  
 Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.  
 Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,  
 Lines I write the first time and the last time. 120  
 He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush,  
 Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,  
 Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,  
 Makes a strange art of an art familiar,  
 Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets. 125  
 He who blows thro' bronze, may breathe thro' silver,  
 Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.  
 He who writes, may write for once as I do.

## XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,  
 Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy, 130  
 Enter each and all, and use their service,  
 Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.  
 Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,  
 Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:  
 I am mine and yours—the rest be all men's, 135  
 Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.  
 Let me speak this once in my true person,  
 Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,

fruition of earthly passion, here he hopes for an increasing number of worldly skills.

125. *Missal-marge*: margin of a mass-book.

126. *Breathe thro' silver*: While he cannot change his artistic medium, he can at least change his method. DeVane (*Handbook*, 244) interprets this to mean that for the first and last time he used trochaic pentameter. While it is true that no poem by Browning achieves such a silvery tone (appropriate to the moon-imagery), still line 137 makes it clear that the change in method was chiefly from dramatic to direct expression of his own feelings, these being in his view the two chief kinds of poetry. (See his "Essay on Shelley.") But it is not true that this is the first or last time he speaks out in his own person.

136. *Karshish, Cleon, etc.*: characters who speak in *Men and Women*.

137. In his "Essay on Shelley" Browning distinguishes two chief kinds of poetry, objective (dramatic) and subjective (direct lyrical expression). He claimed to be almost always portraying characters even when it seems clear to readers that he is setting forth his own views. This confessed exception is thus a special concession to "E.B.B.," who had urged him even before their marriage, in a letter of May 26, 1846, to speak out directly.

Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence:  
 Pray you, look on these my men and women, 140  
 Take and keep my fifty poems finished;  
 Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!  
 Poor the speech; be how I speak, for all things.

## XV

Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!  
 Here in London, yonder late in Florence, 145  
 Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.  
 Curving on a sky imbrued with colour,  
 Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,  
 Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.  
 Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato, 150  
 Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,  
 Perfect till the nightingales applauded.  
 Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,  
 Hard to greet, she traverses the houseroofs,  
 Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver, 155  
 Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

## XVI

What, there 's nothing in the moon noteworthy?  
 Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal,  
 Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),  
 All her magic ('t is the old sweet mythos) 160  
 She would turn a new side to her mortal,  
 Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman—  
 Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,  
 Blind to Galileo on his turret,

---

146. *Thrice-transfigured*: in the three phases, new, full and old. The moon is to Browning a symbol of his wife in other poems.

148. *Fiesole*: town near Florence.

150. *Samminiato*: the Church of San Miniato, on the hills near Florence.

160. *Mythos*: the story of the love of the moon goddess for Endymion. Keats' poem *Endymion* is referred to in line 165.

161. One side of the moon is never seen from the earth.

163. Zoroaster was the founder of the ancient Persian religion whose god Ormazd was the principle of Light. Hence the interest in observation of the heavenly bodies.

164. *Galileo*: Italian astronomer (1564-1642), who first used a telescope and made some discoveries concerning the moon.

Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats—him, even! 165  
 Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal—  
 When she turns round, comes again in heaven,  
 Opens out anew for worse or better!  
 Proves she like some portent of an iceberg  
 Swimming full upon the ship it founders, 170  
 Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?  
 Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire  
 Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?  
 Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu  
 Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest, 175  
 Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.  
 Like the bodied heaven in his clearness  
 Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,  
 When they ate and drank and saw God also!

## XVII

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know. 180  
 Only this is sure—the sight were other,  
 Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,  
 Dying now impoverished here in London.  
 God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures  
 Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with, 185  
 One to show a woman when he loves her!

## XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!  
 This to you—yourself my moon of poets!  
 Ah, but that 's the world's side, there 's the wonder,  
 Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you! 190  
 There, in turn I stand with them and praise you—  
 Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.  
 But the best is when I glide from out them,  
 Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,  
 Come out on the other side, the novel 195  
 Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,  
 Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

165. Shelley translated Homer's "Hymn to Artemis" from the *Iliad*, Bk. XXI.

174. See Exodus, xxiv, 9-10.



## XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,  
 Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,  
 Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it, 200  
 Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom!

R. B.

## JAMES LEE'S WIFE\*

## I.—JAMES LEE'S WIFE SPEAKS AT THE WINDOW

## I

AH, Love, but a day  
 And the world has changed!  
 The sun 's away,  
 And the bird estranged;  
 The wind has dropped, 5  
 And the sky 's deranged:  
 Summer has stopped.

## II

Look in my eyes!  
 Wilt thou change too?  
 Should I fear surprise? 10  
 Shall I find aught new  
 In the old and dear,  
 In the good and true,  
 With the changing year?

## III

Thou art a man, 15  
 But I am thy love.

---

\* This was first published with the title "James Lee," in *Dramatis Personae* (1864). In the collected edition of 1868 the present title was substituted, a significant indication that the center of interest in this (as in so many of Browning's poems) is not the narrative, but the psychology of the speaker. The story of an unfortunate marriage is told in a series of meditations by the wife, who remains constant. Cf. Meredith's *Modern Love*, which had just appeared when Browning began his poem in 1862.

I. While her husband has been away for a day, summer has departed. Will love depart too?

For the lake, its swan;  
For the dell, its dove;  
And for thee—(oh, haste!)  
Me, to bend above, 20  
Me, to hold embraced.

## II.—BY THE FIRESIDE

## I

Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,  
Oak and pine?  
Oh, for the ills half-understood,  
The dim dead woe 25  
Long ago  
Befallen this bitter coast of France!  
Well, poor sailors took their chance;  
I take mine.

## II

A ruddy shaft our fire must shoot 30  
O'er the sea:  
Do sailors eye the casement—mute,  
Drenched and stark,  
From their bark—  
And envy, gnash their teeth for hate 35  
O' the warm safe house and happy freight  
—Thee and me?

## III

God help you, sailors, at your need!  
Spare the curse!  
For some ships, safe in port indeed, 40  
Rot and rust,  
Run to dust,  
All through worms i' the wood, which crept,  
Gnawed our hearts out while we slept:  
That is worse. 45

II. The fire that warms them is of shipwreck wood. Will love be shipwrecked too?

## IV

Who lived here before us two?  
 Old-world pairs.  
 Did a woman ever—would I knew!—  
 Watch the man  
 With whom began 50  
 Love's voyage full-sail,—(now, gnash your teeth!)  
 When planks start, open hell beneath  
 Unawares?

## III.—IN THE DOORWAY

## I

THE swallow has set her six young on the rail,  
 And looks sea-ward: 55  
 The water 's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale  
 To the leeward,—  
 On the weather-side, black, spotted white with the wind.  
 "Good fortune departs, and disaster 's behind,"—  
 Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite wail! 60

## II

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness, has furred  
 Her five fingers,  
 Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world  
 Where there lingers  
 No glint of the gold, Summer sent for her sake: 65  
 How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled on its stake!  
 My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks curled.

## III

Yet here are we two; we have love, house enough,  
 With the field there,  
 This house of four rooms, that field red and rough, 70  
 Though it yield there,  
 For the rabbit that robs, scarce a blade or a bent;  
 If a magpie alight now, it seems an event;  
 And they both will be gone at November's rebuff.

III. The two have everything, including love, but the cold is spreading.

61-7. This stanza describes what Browning saw from his house at Ste. Marie on the coast of Brittany where he lived during the summer of 1862.

72. *Bent*: grass.

## IV

But why must cold spread? but wherefore bring change 75  
 To the spirit,  
 God meant should mate his with an infinite range,  
 And inherit  
 His power to put life in the darkness and cold?  
 Oh, live and love worthily, bear and be bold! 80  
 Whom Summer made friends of, let Winter estrange!

## IV.—ALONG THE BEACH

## I

I WILL be quiet and talk with you,  
 And reason why you are wrong.  
 You wanted my love—is that much true?  
 And so I did love, so I do: 85  
 What has come of it all along?

## II

I took you—how could I otherwise?  
 For a world to me, and more;  
 For all, love greatens and glorifies  
 Till God's a-glow, to the loving eyes, 90  
 In what was mere earth before.

## III

Yes, earth—yes, mere ignoble earth!  
 Now do I mis-state, mistake?  
 Do I wrong your weakness and call it worth?  
 Expect all harvest, dread no dearth, 95  
 Seal my sense up for your sake?

## IV

Oh, Love, Love, no, Lovel not so, indeed!  
 You were just weak earth, I knew:  
 With much in you waste, with many a weed,  
 And plenty of passions run to seed, 100  
 But a little good grain too.

---

IV. There is now no doubt about their estrangement. She reasons with him why he is wrong: She took him as he was—mere earth, full of weeds. She waited for a harvest, but it did not come. Yet he was still her whole world. And her very devotion became irksome to him.

## V

And such as you were, I took you for mine:  
 Did not you find me yours,  
 To watch the olive and wait the vine,  
 And wonder when rivers of oil and wine 105  
 Would flow, as the Book assures?

## VI

Well, and if none of these good things came,  
 What did the failure prove?  
 The man was my whole world, all the same,  
 With his flowers to praise or his weeds to blame, 110  
 And, either or both, to love.

## VII

Yet this turns now to a fault—there! there!  
 That I do love, watch too long,  
 And wait too well, and weary and wear;  
 And 't is all an old story, and my despair 115  
 Fit subject for some new song:

## VIII

“How the light, light love, he has wings to fly  
 At suspicion of a bond:  
 My wisdom has bidden your pleasure good-bye,  
 Which will turn up next in a laughing eye, 120  
 And why should you look beyond?”

## V.—ON THE CLIFF

## I

I LEANED on the turf,  
 I looked at a rock  
 Left dry by the surf;  
 For the turf, to call it grass were to mock: 125  
 Dead to the roots, so deep was done  
 The work of the summer sun.

V. Like a gay cricket or resplendent butterfly, love settles on barren, low minds, bringing them a grace that is not theirs. (*Cf.* the Christian doctrine of the Grace of God.)

## II

And the rock lay flat  
 As an anvil's face:  
 No iron like that! 130  
 Baked dry; of a weed, of a shell, no trace:  
 Sunsnine outside, but ice at the core,  
 Death's altar by the lone shore.

## III

On the turf, sprang gay  
 With his films of blue, 135  
 No cricket, I 'll say,  
 But a warhorse, barded and chanfroned too,  
 The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,  
 Real fairy, with wings all right.

## IV

On the rock, they scorch 140  
 Like a drop of fire  
 From a brandished torch,  
 Fall two red fans of a butterfly:  
 No turf, no rock: in their ugly stead,  
 See, wonderful blue and red! 145

## V

Is it not so  
 With the minds of men?  
 The level and low,  
 The burnt and bare, in themselves; but then  
 With such a blue and red grace, not theirs,— 150  
 Love settling unawares!

## VI.—READING A BOOK, UNDER THE CLIFF

## I

"STILL ailing, Wind? Wilt be appeased or no?  
 Which needs the other's office, thou or I?

137. *Barded and chanfroned*: armed and plumed.

138. *Quixote-mage*: quixotic magician.

VI. She is reading a book of poetry by some young man—Browning himself, who had published the quoted poem (here stanzas I—VI) in the *Monthly Repository*, May, 1836. She regards the poem as an expression of youthful inexperience. What the wind really announces is change.

Dost want to be disburthened of a woe,  
And can, in truth, my voice untie  
Its links, and let it go? 155

## II

"Art thou a dumb wronged thing that would be righted,  
Entrusting thus thy cause to me? Forbear!  
No tongue can mend such pleadings; faith, requited  
With falsehood,—love, at last aware 160  
Of scorn,—hopes, early blighted,—

## III

"We have them; but I know not any tone  
So fit as thine to falter forth a sorrow:  
Dost think men would go mad without a moan,  
If they knew any way to borrow 165  
A pathos like thy own?

## IV

"Which sigh wouldst mock, of all the sighs? The one  
So long escaping from lips starved and blue,  
That lasts while on her pallet-bed the nun  
Stretches her length; her foot comes through 170  
The straw she shivers on;

## V

"You had not thought she was so tall: and spent,  
Her shrunk lids open, her lean fingers shut  
Close, close, their sharp and livid nails indent  
The clammy palm; then all is mute: 175  
That way, the spirit went.

## VI

"Or wouldst thou rather that I understand  
Thy will to help me?—like the dog I found  
Once, pacing sad this solitary strand,  
Who would not take my food, poor hound, 180  
But whined and licked my hand."

## VII

All this, and more, comes from some young man's pride  
Of power to see,—in failure and mistake,  
Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side,—

Merely examples for his sake,  
Helps to his path untried: 185

## VIII

Instances he must—simply recognize?  
Oh, more than so!—must, with a learner's zeal,  
Make doubly prominent, twice emphasize,  
By added touches that reveal 190  
The god in babe's disguise.

## IX

Oh, he knows what defeat means, and the rest!  
Himself the undefeated that shall be:  
Failure, disgrace, he flings them you to test,—  
His triumph, in eternity 195  
Too plainly manifest!

## X

Whence, judge if he learn forthwith what the wind  
Means in its moaning—by the happy prompt  
Instinctive way of youth, I mean; for kind  
Calm years, exacting their accopt 200  
Of pain, mature the mind:

## XI

And some midsummer morning, at the lull  
Just about daybreak, as he looks across  
A sparkling foreign country, wonderful  
To the sea's edge for gloom and gloss, 205  
Next minute must annul,—

## XII

Then, when the wind begins among the vines,  
So low, so low, what shall it say but this?  
"Here is the change beginning, here the lines  
Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss 210  
The limit time assigns."

## XIII

Nothing can be as it has been before;  
Better, so call it, only not the same.  
To draw one beauty into our hearts' core,  
And keep it changeless! such our claim; 215  
So answered,—Never more!



## XIV

Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the world;  
 Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and die.  
 Rise with it, then! Rejoice that man is hurled  
 From change to change unceasingly, 220  
 His soul's wings never furled!

## XV

That 's a new question; still replies the fact,  
 Nothing endures: the wind moans, saying so;  
 We moan in acquiescence: there 's life's pact,  
 Perhaps probation—do I know? 225  
 God does: endure his act!

## XVI

Only, for man, how bitter not to grave  
 On his soul's hands' palms one fair good wise thing  
 Just as he grasped it! For himself, death's wave;  
 While time first washes—ah, the sting!— 230  
 O'er all he 'd sink to save.

## VII.—AMONG THE ROCKS

## I

OH, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,  
 This autumn morning! How he sets his bones  
 To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet  
 For the ripple to run over in its mirth; 235  
 Listening the while, where on the heap of stones  
 The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

## II

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;  
 Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.  
 If you loved only what were worth your love, 240  
 Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:  
 Make the low nature better by your throes!  
 Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

VII. She decides that while he is not worth her love, she should not expect her love to be rewarded on earth. Her suffering may make his low nature better.

## VIII.—BESIDE THE DRAWING BOARD

## I

"As like as a Hand to another Hand!"  
 Whoever said that foolish thing, 245  
 Could not have studied to understand  
 The counsels of God in fashioning,  
 Out of the infinite love of his heart,  
 This Hand, whose beauty I praise, apart  
 From the world of wonder left to praise, 250  
 If I tried to learn the other ways  
 Of love in its skill, or love in its power.  
 "As like as a Hand to another Hand":  
 Who said that, never took his stand,  
 Found and followed, like me, an hour, 255  
 The beauty in this,—how free, how fine  
 To fear, almost,—of the limit-line!  
 As I looked at this, and learned and drew,  
 Drew and learned, and looked again,  
 While fast the happy minutes flew, 260  
 Its beauty mounted into my brain,  
 And a fancy seized me; I was fain  
 To efface my work, begin anew,  
 Kiss what before I only drew;  
 Ay, laying the red chalk 'twixt my lips, 265  
 With soul to help if the mere lips failed,  
 I kissed all right where the drawing ailed,  
 Kissed fast the grace that somehow slips  
 Still from one's soulless finger-tips.

## II

'T is a clay cast, the perfect thing, 270  
 From Hand live once, dead long ago:

VIII. A clay cast of a beautiful hand that she has been drawing lies before her; but she turns from this ideal perfection to the living rough hand of a peasant girl, recognizing Leonardo da Vinci's scientific interest in reality. (Browning, the realistic poet, is closer to science than to Platonism in his own esthetics.) Similarly, she has been a fool to look for the ideal in her love.

270-330. The second stanza and first section of the third stanza were added in the 1868 edition.

Princess-like it wears the ring  
 To fancy's eye, by which we know  
 That here at length a master found  
 His match, a proud lone soul its mate, 275  
 As soaring genius sank to ground,  
 And pencil could not emulate  
 The beauty in this,—how free, how fine  
 To fear almost!—of the limit-line.  
 Long ago the god, like me 280  
 The worm, learned, each in our degree:  
 Looked and loved, learned and drew,  
 Drew and learned and loved again,  
 While fast the happy minutes flew,  
 Till beauty mounted into his brain 285  
 And on the finger which outvied  
 His art he placed the ring that 's there,  
 Still by fancy's eye descried,  
 In token of a marriage rare:  
 For him on earth, his art's despair, 290  
 For him in heaven, his soul's fit bride.

## III

Little girl with the poor coarse hand  
 I turned from to a cold clay cast—  
 I have my lesson, understand  
 The worth of flesh and blood at last. 295  
 Nothing but beauty in a Hand?  
 Because he could not change the hue,  
 Mend the lines and make them true  
 To this which met his soul's demand,—  
 Would Da Vinci turn from you? 300  
 I hear him laugh my woes to scorn—  
 "The fool forsooth is all forlorn  
 Because the beauty, she thinks best,  
 Lived long ago or was never born,—  
 Because no beauty bears the test 305  
 In this rough peasant Hand! Confessed!  
 'Art is null and study void!'  
 So sayest thou? So said not I,  
 Who threw the faulty pencil by,  
 And years instead of hours employed, 310

Learning the veritable use  
 Of flesh and bone and nerve beneath  
 Lines and hue of the outer sheath,  
 If haply I might reproduce  
 One motive of the powers profuse, 315  
 Flesh and bone and nerve that make  
 The poorest coarsest human hand  
 An object worthy to be scanned  
 A whole life long for their sole sake.  
 Shall earth and the cramped moment-space 320  
 Yield the heavenly crowning grace?  
 Now the parts and then the whole!  
 Who art thou, with stunted soul  
 And stunted body, thus to cry  
 'I love,—shall that be life's strait dole? 325  
 I must live beloved or die!'  
 This peasant hand that spins the wool  
 And bakes the bread, why lives it on,  
 Poor and coarse with beauty gone,—  
 What use survives the beauty?" Fool! 330

Go, little girl with the poor coarse hand!  
 I have my lesson, shall understand.

## IX.—ON DECK

## I

THERE is nothing to remember in me,  
 Nothing I ever said with a grace,  
 Nothing I did that you care to see, 335  
 Nothing I was that deserves a place  
 In your mind, now I leave you, set you free.

## II

Conceded! In turn, concede to me,  
 Such things have been as a mutual flame.

---

IX. She is leaving him. She was harsh, ill-favored, without grace or beauty; but if he had loved her as she loved him, she might have been transformed in his eyes. (Browning himself, while he wishes to avoid classical idealism, believes in pushing on beyond the known truth and accepting romantic illusions.)

Your soul 's locked fast; but, love for a key, 340  
You might let it loose, till I grew the same  
In your eyes, as in mine you stand: strange plea!

## III

For then, then, what would it matter to me  
That I was the harsh ill-favoured one?  
We both should be like as pea and pea; 345  
It was ever so since the world begun:  
So, let me proceed with my reverie.

## IV

How strange it were if you had all me,  
As I have all you in my heart and brain,  
You, whose least word brought gloom or glee, 350  
Who never lifted the hand in vain—  
Will hold mine yet, from over the sea!

## V

Strange, if a face, when you thought of me,  
Rose like your own face present now,  
With eyes as dear in their due degree, 355  
Much such a mouth, and as bright a brow,  
Till you saw yourself, while you cried "'T is She!"

## VI

Well, you may, you must, set down to me  
Love that was life, life that was love;  
A tenure of breath at your lips' decree, 360  
A passion to stand as your thoughts approve,  
A rapture to fall where your foot might be.

## VII

But did one touch of such love for me  
Come in a word or a look of yours,  
Whose words and looks will, circling, flee 365  
Round me and round while life endures,—  
Could I fancy "As I feel, thus feels he";

## VIII

Why, fade you might to a thing like me,  
And your hair grow these coarse hanks of hair,

Your skin, this bark of a gnarled tree,—  
 You might turn myself!—should I know or care  
 When I should be dead of joy, James Lee?

370

## THE WORST OF IT\*

## I

Would it were I had been false, not you!  
 I that am nothing, not you that are all:  
 I, never the worse for a touch or two  
 On my speckled hide; not you, the pride  
 Of the day, my swan, that a first fleck's fall  
 On her wonder of white must unswan, undo!

5

## II

I had dipped in life's struggle and, out again,  
 Bore specks of it here, there, easy to see,  
 When I found my swan and the cure was plain;  
 The dull turned bright as I caught your white  
 On my bosom: you saved me—saved in vain  
 If you ruined yourself, and all through me!

10

## III

Yes, all through the speckled beast that I am,  
 Who taught you to stoop; you gave me yourself,  
 And bound your soul by the vows that damn:  
 Since on better thought you break, as you ought,  
 Vows—words, no angel set down, some elf  
 Mistook,—for an oath, an epigram!

15

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\* This was published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864), and embodies both of the two main themes of the poems in that volume: disappointment in human love, and hope from Divine Love in spite of the problems involved. The speaker seems to be a man whose wife has been false to him, but who thinks only of the injury she has done herself, and blames himself for her sins. In stooping to save him, she ruined herself. "The worst of it" is that her purity, which was once his salvation, has been stained. Loving and forgiving her himself, he yet reminds her that she is a sinner in the eyes of God, in danger of not going to heaven, and fears that it will be his duty at the end of her life to join the devil in stabbing her. He hopes that she will work out her penance, and return to virtue, though not to him. Notice the man's conception of a "glass and gold" heaven, and his assumption that he himself is more forgiving than God.

## IV

Yes, might I judge you, here were my heart,  
 And a hundred its like, to treat as you pleased! 20  
 I choose to be yours, for my proper part,  
 Yours, leave or take, or mar me or make;  
 If I acquiesce, why should you be teased  
 With the conscience-prick and the memory-smart?

## V

But what will God say? Oh, my sweet, 25  
 Think, and be sorry you did this thing  
 Though earth were unworthy to feel your feet,  
 There's a heaven above may deserve your love:  
 Should you forfeit heaven for a snapt gold ring  
 And a promise broke, were it just or meet? 30

## VI

And I to have tempted you! I, who tried  
 Your soul, no doubt, till it sank! Unwise,  
 I loved, and was lowly, loved and aspired,  
 Loved, grieving or glad, till I made you mad,  
 And you meant to have hated and despised— 35  
 Whereas, you deceived me nor inquired!

## VII

She, ruined? How? No heaven for her?  
 Crowns to give, and none for the brow  
 That looked like marble and smelt like myrrh?  
 Shall the robe be worn, and the palm-branch borne, 40  
 And she go graceless, she graced now  
 Beyond all saints, as themselves aver?

## VIII

Hardly! That must be understood!  
 The earth is your place of penance, then;  
 And what will it prove? I desire your good, 45  
 But, plot as I may, I can find no way  
 How a blow should fall, such as falls on men,  
 Nor prove too much for your womanhood.

## IX

It will come, I suspect, at the end of life,  
When you walk alone, and review the past; 50  
And I, who so long shall have done with strife,  
And journeyed my stage and earned my wage  
And retired as was right,—I am called at last  
When the devil stabs you, to lend the knife.

## X

He stabs for the minute of trivial wrong, 55  
Nor the other hours are able to save,  
The happy, that lasted my whole life long:  
For a promise broke, not for first words spoke,  
The true, the only, that turn my grave  
To a blaze of joy and a crash of song. 60

## XI

Witness beforehand! Off I trip  
On a safe path gay through the flowers you flung:  
My very name made great by your lip,  
And my heart a-glow with the good I know  
Of a perfect year when we both were young, 65  
And I tasted the angels' fellowship.

## XII

And witness, moreover . . . Ah, but wait!  
I spy the loop whence an arrow shoots!  
It may be for yourself, when you meditate,  
That you grieve—for slain ruth, murdered truth. 70  
"Though falsehood escape in the end, what boots?  
How truth would have triumphed!"—you sigh too late.

## XIII

Ay, who would have triumphed like you, I say!  
Well, it is lost now; well, you must bear,  
Abide and grow fit for a better day: 75  
You should hardly grudge, could I be your judge!  
But hush! For you, can be no despair:  
There's amends: 'tis a secret: hope and pray!



## XIV

For I was true at least—oh, true enough!  
 And, Dear, truth is not as good as it seems! 80  
 Commend me to conscience! Idle stuff!  
 Much help is in mine, as I mope and pine,  
 And skulk through day, and scowl in my dreams  
 At my swan's obtaining the crow's rebuff.

## XV

Men tell me of truth now—"False!" I cry: 85  
 Of beauty—"A mask, friend! Look beneath!"  
 We take our own method, the devil and I,  
 With pleasant and fair and wise and rare:  
 And the best we wish to what lives, is—death;  
 Which even in wishing, perhaps we lie! 90

## XVI

Far better commit a fault and have done—  
 As you, Dear! for ever; and choose the pure,  
 And look where the healing waters run,  
 And strive and strain to be good again,  
 And a place in the other world ensure, 95  
 All glass and gold, with God for its sun.

## XVII

Misery! What shall I say or do?  
 I cannot advise, or, at least, persuade:  
 Most like, you are glad you deceived me—rue  
 No whit of the wrong: you endured too long, 100  
 Have done no evil and want no aid,  
 Will live the old life out and chance the new.

## XVIII

And your sentence is written all the same,  
 And I can do nothing,—pray, perhaps:  
 But somehow the world pursues its game,— 105  
 If I pray, if I curse,—for better or worse;  
 And my faith is torn to a thousand scraps,  
 And my heart feels ice while my words breathe flame.

## XIX

Dear, I look from my hiding-place.

Are you still so fair? Have you still the eyes?

110

Be happy! Add but the other grace,

Be good! Why want what the angels vaunt?

I knew you once; but in Paradise,

If we meet, I will pass nor turn my face.

DÎS ALITER VISUM; OR, LE BYRON  
DE NOS JOURS\*

## I

Stop, let me have the truth of that!

Is that all true? I say, the day

Ten years ago when both of us

Met on a morning, friends—as thus

We meet this evening, friends or what?—

5

## II

Did you—because I took your arm

And sillily smiled, “A mass of brass

That sea looks, blazing underneath!”

While up the cliff-road edged with heath,

We took the turns nor came to harm—

10

## III

Did you consider “Now makes twice

That I have seen her, walked and talked

With this poor pretty thoughtful thing,

Whose worth I weigh: she tries to sing;

Draws, hopes in time the eye grows nice;

15

---

\* *Dis aliter visum*, from Virgil's *Aeneid* (II, 428), “To the gods it seemed otherwise.” The speaker in Browning's poem is a woman who rebukes a man for not yielding to his love for her ten years before; his failure to speak has ruined four souls. The scene is on the French coast; and the French subtitle, *Le Byron de nos jours*, means “The Byron of our days.” Byron's “Dream” tells of a similar tragic quadrangle, but the relative positions of the man and woman are reversed. Notice the contrast between the Byronic lover of the Romantic period and the restrained “realist” typical of Mid-Victorian days. Browning's sympathy was for the romantic lover, and his own courtship of Elizabeth Barrett is one of the most impetuous in the annals of literature. In his letter to her on August

## IV

"Reads verse and thinks she understands;  
 Loves all, at any rate, that 's great,  
 Good, beautiful; but much as we  
 Down at the bath-house love the sea,  
 Who breathe its salt and bruise its sands: 20

## V

"While . . . do but follow the fishing-gull  
 That flaps and floats from wave to cave!  
 There 's the sea-lover, fair my friend!  
 What then? Be patient, mark and mend!  
 Had you the making of your scull?" 25

## VI

And did you, when we faced the church  
 With spire and sad slate roof, aloof  
 From human fellowship so far,  
 Where a few graveyard crosses are,  
 And garlands for the swallows' perch,— 30

## VII

Did you determine, as we stepped  
 O'er the lone stone fence, "Let me get  
 Her for myself, and what 's the earth  
 With all its art, verse, music, worth—  
 Compared with love, found, gained, and kept? 35

## VIII

"Schumann 's our music-maker now;  
 Has his march-movement youth and mouth?  
 Ingres 's the modern man that paints;  
 Which will lean on me, of his saints?  
 Heine for songs; for kisses, how?" 40

22, 1846, he mentions how much more he cares for Byron than for Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey put together: "I would at any time have gone to Finchley to see a curl of his hair or one of his gloves." This poem was published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864).

36. Robert Schumann (1810-58), German composer.

38. Jean August Ingres (1780-1867), French painter.

## IX

And did you, when we entered, reached  
 The votive frigate, soft aloft  
 Riding on air this hundred years,  
 Safe-smiling at old hopes and fears,—  
 Did you draw profit while she preached? 45

## X

Resolving, "Fools we wise men grow!  
 Yes, I could easily blurt out curt  
 Some question that might find reply  
 As prompt in her stopped lips, dropped eye,  
 And rush of red to cheek and brow: 50

## XI

"Thus were a match made, sure and fast,  
 'Mid the blue weed-flowers round the mound  
 Where, issuing, we shall stand and stay  
 For one more look at baths and bay,  
 Sands, sea-gulls, and the old church last— 55

## XII

"A match 'twixt me, bent, wigged and lamed,  
 Famous, however, for verse and worse,  
 Sure of the Fortieth spare Arm-chair  
 When gout and glory seat me there,  
 So, one whose love-freaks pass unblamed,— 60

## XIII

"And this young beauty, round and sound  
 As a mountain-apple, youth and truth  
 With loves and doves, at all events  
 With money in the Three per Cents;  
 Whose choice of me would seem profound:— 65

42. *The votive frigate*: a pious offering, a model of a vessel, hanging in the church.

58. A vacancy is created in the French Academy when one of its forty members dies.

64. British government bonds yielding 3%, an investment noted for safety.

## XIV

"She might take me as I take her.  
 Perfect the hour would pass, alas!  
 Climb high, love high, what matter? Still,  
 Feet, feelings, must descend the hill:  
 An hour's perfection can't recur. 70

## XV

"Then follows Paris and full time  
 For both to reason: 'Thus with us!'  
 She 'll sigh, 'Thus girls give body and soul  
 At first word, think they gain the goal,  
 When 't is the starting-place they climb! 75

## XVI

" 'My friend makes verse and gets renown;  
 Have they all fifty years, his peers?  
 He knows the world, firm, quiet and gay;  
 Boys will become as much one day:  
 They're fools; he cheats, with beard less brown. 80

## XVII

" 'For boys say, *Love me or I die!*  
 He did not say, *The truth is, youth*  
*I want, who am old and know too much;*  
*I'd catch youth: lend me sight and touch!*  
*Drop heart's blood where life's wheels grate dry!* 85

## XVIII

"While I should make rejoinder"—(then  
 It was, no doubt, you ceased that least  
 Light pressure of my arm in yours)  
 "I can conceive of cheaper cures  
 For a yawning-fit o'er books and men. 90

## XIX

"What? All I am, was, and might be,  
 All, books taught, art brought, life's whole strife,

85. It has seemed advisable here to add a single quotation mark after *dry* though it is not in the text followed.

Painful results since precious, just  
Were fitly exchanged, in wise disgust,  
For two cheeks freshened by youth and sea? 95

## XX

“‘All for a nosegay!—what came first;  
With fields on flower, untried each side;  
I rally, need my books and men,  
And find a nosegay’: drop it, then,  
No match yet made for best or worst!” 100

## XXI

That ended me. You judged the porch  
We left by, Norman; took our look  
At sea and sky; wondered so few  
Find out the place for air and view;  
Remarked the sun began to scorch; 105

## XXII

Descended, soon regained the baths,  
And then, good-bye! Years ten since then:  
Ten years! We meet: you tell me, now,  
By a window-seat for that cliff-brow,  
On carpet-stripes for those sand-paths. 110

## XXIII

Now I may speak: you fool, for all  
Your lore! Who made things plain in vain?  
What was the sea for? What, the grey  
Sad church, that solitary day,  
Crosses and graves and swallows’ call? 115

## XXIV

Was there nought better than to enjoy?  
No feat which, done, would make time break,  
And let us pent-up creatures through  
Into eternity, our due?  
No forcing earth teach heaven’s employ? 120

## XXV

No wise beginning, here and now,  
What cannot grow complete (earth’s feat)

And heaven must finish, there and then?  
 No tasting earth's true food for men,  
 Its sweet in sad, its sad in sweet? 125

## XXVI

No grasping at love, gaining a share  
 O' the sole spark from God's life at strife  
 With death, so, sure of range above  
 The limits here? For us and love,  
 Failure; but, when God fails, despair. 130

## XXVII

This you call wisdom? Thus you add  
 Good unto good again, in vain?  
 You loved, with body worn and weak;  
 I loved, with faculties to seek:  
 Were both loves worthless since ill-clad? 135

## XXVIII

Let the mere star-fish in his vault  
 Crawl in a wash of weed, indeed,  
 Rose-jacynth to the finger-tips:  
 He, whole in body and soul, outstrips  
 Man, found with either in default. 140

## XXIX

But what 's whole, can increase no more,  
 Is dwarfed and dies, since here 's its sphere.  
 The devil laughed at you in his sleeve!  
 You knew not? That I well believe;  
 Or you had saved two souls: nay, four. 145

## XXX

For Stephanie sprained last night her wrist,  
 Ankle or something. "Pooh," cry you?  
 At any rate she danced, all say,  
 Vilely; her vogue has had its day.  
 Here comes my husband from his whist. 150

123. It is a favorite thought of Browning that Heaven completes things begun with intensity on earth, that such a beginning is better than completeness on a lower level. Cf. "A Grammarian's Funeral," "Evelyn Hope," and "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

## ABT VOGLER\*

(AFTER HE HAS BEEN EXTEMPORIZING UPON THE  
MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OF HIS INVENTION)

## I

Would that the structure brave, the manifold music I build,  
 Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,  
 Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when Solomon  
 willed  
 Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons that lurk,  
 Man, brute, reptile, fly,—alien of end and of aim, 5  
 Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep re-  
 moved,—  
 Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable Name,  
 And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princess he  
 loved!

\* Published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864), this might be called Browning's most notable "metaphysical" poem. It illustrates how his poetry forms a link (in thought as well as in style) between the seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry and that of later followers like T. S. Eliot. Since the philosophy he presents here, and the figure through which it is symbolized, are both ancient and timeless, there is no anachronism in ascribing his own views to an eighteenth-century Bavarian musician and priest (hence Abt or Abbé) George Joseph Vogler (1749–1814). Browning himself was trained in the musical system invented by Vogler, through his music teacher John Relfe, who, like Meyerbeer and Weber, studied under Vogler. Browning was fond of extemporizing music.

*Subtitle:* Vogler invented the "orchestration," a small organ. He was a great extemporizer—hence much of the music he created would seem, at first thought, to be destined for a very transient existence. This raises the philosophical problem: Can anything be real that does not have material existence? Is a piece of music real if it will never be played again? In the words of Newman, "Is it possible that inexhaustible evolution and disposition of notes, so rich yet so simple, so intricate yet so regulated, so various yet so majestic, should be a mere sound which is gone and perishes?" Newman says that under such a form "great wonders unknown seem to be typified." Abt Vogler in this poem gives approximately the same Christian-Platonist argument, but turns it in the direction of Browning's optimism. We have no evidence that Abbé Vogler actually engaged in these speculations.

3. According to Jewish and Mohammedan legends, Solomon had power to command demons because of a seal on which was engraved the "ineffable Name" of God.



## II

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of mine,  
 This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to  
     raise! 10  
 Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and now  
     combine,  
 Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise!  
 And one would bury his brow with a blind plunge down to hell,  
     Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,  
 Then up again swim into sight, having based me my palace  
     well, 15  
 Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.

## III

And another would mount and march, like the excellent minion  
     he was,  
 Ay, another and yet another, one crowd but with many a crest,  
 Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent as glass,  
     Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the rest: 20  
 For higher still and higher (as a runner tips with fire,  
     When a great illumination surprises a festal night—  
 Outlining round and round Rome's dome from space to spire)  
     Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride of my soul was  
     in sight.

## IV

In sight? Not half! for it seemed, it was certain, to match  
     man's birth, 25  
 Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;  
 And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to reach  
     the earth,  
 As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to scale the sky:  
 Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with  
     mine,

---

9. Music has often been compared to architecture.

13-14. Does Browning consider "hell . . . the roots of things"? Browning's optimism may be strong enough to grant even this. Cf. "Apollo and the Fates." With this as a starting point, all movement would be good.

21-3. The dome of St. Peter's Cathedral is illuminated on important festival nights.

Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering  
 star; 30  
 Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor pine,  
 For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near  
 nor far.

## V

Nay more; for there wanted not who walked in the glare and  
 glow,  
 Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Protoplast,  
 Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should  
 blow, 35  
 Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking at last;  
 Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the body  
 and gone,  
 But were back once more to breathe in an old world worth  
 their new:  
 What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon;  
 And what is,—shall I say, matched both? for I was made  
 perfect too. 40

## VI

All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of my soul,  
 All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed visibly  
 forth,  
 All through music and me! For think, had I painted the whole,  
 Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so wonder-  
 worth:  
 Had I written the same, made verse—still, effect proceeds from  
 cause, 45  
 Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is told;  
 It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,  
 Painter and poet are proud in the artist-list enrolled:—

## VII

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,  
 Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they are! 50

---

34. *Protoplast*: that which is modeled first, from which things are made.

And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,  
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a  
star.

Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is nought;

It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and all is said:

Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought: 55

And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the  
head!

## VIII

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;

Gone! and the good tears start, the praises that come too slow;

For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he feared,

That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing was to go. 60

Never to be again! But many more of the kind

As good, nay, better perchance: is this your comfort to me?

To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind

To the same, same self, same love, same God: ay, what was,  
shall be.

## IX

Therefore to whom turn I but to thee, the ineffable Name? 65

Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with hands!

What, have fear of change from thee who art ever the same?

Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power  
expands?

There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as  
before;

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound; 70

---

52. The musical reality is not the sum total of three material sounds but an ideal structure. H. J. Muller begins his summary of Gestalt psychology (in *Science and Criticism*, New Haven, 1943, p. 157) thus: "A melody is a related whole, something more than the notes that compose it; (played in another key, with utterly different notes, it is recognizable)." Von Ehrenfels observed that this simple fact of experience cannot be explained by a psychological theory of elements in mechanical association. This 'was the origin of the theory of Gestalt.' Thus Browning anticipated the twentieth century in phrasing an answer to the older psychology which founded all mental life on association of sensations.

64 ff. Cf. "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 157-8.

66. Cf. 2 Corinthians, v, 1.

70. Cf. the view expressed by various philosophers: Neo-Platonists, Spinoza, Hegel, and other idealistic monists. This is the basis of Brown-

What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;  
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

## X

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;  
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power  
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist 75  
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.  
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,  
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,  
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;  
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by. 80

## XI

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence  
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?  
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue  
thence?  
Why rushed the discords in but that harmony should be  
prized?  
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear, 85  
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:  
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;  
The rest may reason and welcome: 't is we musicians know.

## XII

Well, it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:  
I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce. 90  
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,  
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,—yes,  
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,  
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep;  
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is  
found, 95  
The C Major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.

ing's optimism. In the century in which Abt Vogler lived, a similar view of evil had been set forth by Leibnitz and ridiculed in Voltaire's *Candide*.

72. Cf. "A Grammarian's Funeral," lines 97 ff.

91-6. Vogler comes down to the common level. C Major is the natural scale, having no sharps or flats.

## RABBI BEN EZRA\*

## I

GROW old along with me!  
 The best is yet to be,  
 The last of life, for which the first was made:  
 Our times are in His hand  
 Who saith "A whole I planned,  
 Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid!" 5

## II

Not that, amassing flowers,  
 Youth sighed "Which rose make ours,  
 Which lily leave and then as best recall?"  
 Not that, admiring stars, 10  
 It yearned "Nor Jove, nor Mars;  
 Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends them all!"

## III

Not for such hopes and fears  
 Annulling youth's brief years,  
 Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark! 15  
 Rather I prize the doubt  
 Low kinds exist without,  
 Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

## IV

Poor vaunt of life indeed,  
 Were man but formed to feed 20  
 On joy, to solely seek and find and feast:  
 Such feasting ended, then  
 As sure an end to men;

---

\* The monistic tendencies of Browning's romantic philosophy would naturally attract him to this Neo-Platonist of the twelfth century who here becomes spokesman for the poet. Abraham Ibn Ezra (Abenezra) fled from Spain and after much travel died at Rome; he seems to have had reason to consider the last of his life pleasanter than the first. But Browning, who had perhaps the luckiest youth and early manhood of any English poet, had little experience in welcoming "each rebuff." The jaunty rhythm is appropriate to the thought. The poem was published in *Dramatis Personae* in 1864, and was answered by Matthew Arnold's poem "Growing Old," in 1867. This Neo-Platonism and optimism should be compared with Emerson's thought.

Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed  
beast?

## V

Rejoice we are allied 25  
To That which doth provide  
And not partake, effect and not receive!  
A spark disturbs our clod;  
Nearer we hold of God  
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe. 30

## VI

Then, welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!  
Be our joys three-parts pain!  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain; 35  
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

## VII

For thence,—a paradox  
Which comforts while it mocks,—  
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:  
What I aspired to be, 40  
And was not, comforts me:  
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

## VIII

What is he but a brute  
Whose flesh has soul to suit,  
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play? 45  
To man, propose this test—  
Thy body at its best,  
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

---

24 ff. A man would rather *not* have the contentment of an animal that is free of care because its stomach is crammed. Compare Ibn Ezra, *Comment, Job, xxxv, 11*, "Man has the sole privilege of becoming superior to the beast and the fowl."

48. Cf. Ibn Ezra, *Comment, Psalm, xxii, 22*, "The soul of man is called lonely because it is separated during its union with the body from the universal soul, into which it is again received when it departs from its earthly companion." (Cf. Emerson's doctrine of the "Over-Soul.")

## IX

Yet gifts should prove their use:  
 I own the Past profuse 50  
 Of power each side, perfection every turn:  
 Eyes, ears took in their dole,  
 Brain treasured up the whole;  
 Should not the heart beat once "How good to live and learn?"

## X

Not once beat "Praise be Thine! 55  
 I see the whole design,  
 I, who saw power, see now love perfect too:  
 Perfect I call Thy plan:  
 Thanks that I was a man!  
 Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou shalt do!" 60

## XI

For pleasant is this flesh;  
 Our soul, in its rose-mesh  
 Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest;  
 Would we some prize might hold  
 To match those manifold 65  
 Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best!

## XII

Let us not always say  
 "Spite of this flesh to-day  
 I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"  
 As the bird wings and sings, 70  
 Let us cry "All good things  
 Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!"

57. Browning expresses this interpretation of God in other poems, such as "Cleon," "Saul," "Karshish."

68-9. Here Browning makes the speaker protest against one of Ibn Ezra's own doctrines, that "as long as the bodily desires are strong, the soul is weak and powerless against them" (*Comment, Ecclesiastes vii, 3*). But there are similarities between what follows in the poem and in Ibn Ezra: "therefore, after the victory gained with the support of the animal soul [the higher quality of the body] over the desires, it is necessary that the soul should devote itself to wisdom, and seek its support for the subjection of the passions, in order to remain under the sole control of knowledge."

72. This glorification of the flesh should be contrasted with the kind of idealism which issues in asceticism and Puritanism. Browning's position is

## XIII

Therefore I summon age  
 To grant youth's heritage,  
 Life's struggle having so far reached its term: 75  
 Thence shall I pass, approved  
 A man, for aye removed  
 From the developed brute; a god though in the germ.

## XIV

And I shall thereupon  
 Take rest, ere I be gone 80  
 Once more on my adventure brave and new:  
 Fearless and unperplexed,  
 When I wage battle next,  
 What weapons to select, what armour to indue.

## XV

Youth ended, I shall try 85  
 My gain or loss thereby;  
 Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold:  
 And I shall weigh the same,  
 Give life its praise or blame:  
 Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old. 90

## XVI

For note, when evening shuts,  
 A certain moment cuts  
 The deed off, calls the glory from the grey:  
 A whisper from the west  
 Shoots—"Add this to the rest, 95  
 Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."

a typical "Victorian compromise"—making the best of both material and spiritual, without admitting that anything of either need be sacrificed. Contrast the Gospel of John (Browning's favorite book of the Bible) which says, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (vi, 63).

81. *Adventure brave and new*: life after death. But if there is nothing to fear, can it be called an adventure? Perhaps the poet's ideas, and rhythms, imply more confidence than he actually feels.

84. *Indue*: put on.



## XVII

So, still within this life,  
 Though lifted o'er its strife,  
 Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,  
     "This rage was right i' the main, 100  
     That acquiescence vain:  
 The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

## XVIII

For more is not reserved  
 To man, with soul just nerved  
 To act to-morrow what he learns to-day: 105  
     Here, work enough to watch  
     The Master work, and catch  
 Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

## XIX

As it was better, youth  
 Should strive, through acts uncouth, 110  
 Toward making, than repose on aught found made:  
     So, better, age, exempt  
     From strife, should know, than tempt  
 Further. Thou waitedest age: wait death nor be afraid!

## XX

Enough now, if the Right 115  
 And Good and Infinite  
 Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,  
     With knowledge absolute,  
     Subject to no dispute  
 From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone. 120

## XXI

Be there, for once and all,  
 Severed great minds from small,  
 Announced to each his station in the Past!  
     Was I, the world arraigned,  
     Were they, my soul disdained, 125  
 Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

---

119-20. Not subject to dispute by fools such as those who destroyed the solitude of youth. Contrast this romantic conception, that truth is found in solitude, with the Socratic search for truth through discussion.

## XXII

Now, who shall arbitrate?  
 Ten men love what I hate,  
 Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;  
 Ten, who in ears and eyes  
 Match me: we all surmise, 130  
 They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

## XXIII

Not on the vulgar mass  
 Called "work," must sentence pass,  
 Things done, that took the eye and had the price; 135  
 O'er which, from level stand,  
 The low world laid its hand,  
 Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

## XXIV

But all, the world's coarse thumb  
 And finger failed to plumb, 140  
 So passed in making up the main account;  
 All instincts immature,  
 All purposes unsure,  
 That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

## XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed 145  
 Into a narrow act,  
 Fancies that broke through language and escaped;  
 All I could never be,  
 All, men ignored in me,  
 This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped. 150

141. *So passed*: and so passed over.

142 ff. Contrast any form of belief in "salvation through works," such as the conception of ethics expressed in the saying, "Hell is paved with good intentions."

150-156. DeVane thinks this whole poem may be an answer to the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, published by FitzGerald in 1859. Certainly this passage attacks the sort of futilitarianism expressed in stanzas 82-90 of the *Rubáiyát*. See Isaiah, lxiv, 8; and Jeremiah, xviii, 2-6.

## XXVI

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,  
 That metaphor! and feel  
 Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—  
 Thou, to whom fools propound,  
 When the wine makes its round,  
 "Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!" 155

## XXVII

Fool! All that is, at all,  
 Lasts ever, past recall;  
 Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:  
 What entered into thee, 160  
*That* was, is, and shall be:  
 Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

## XXVIII

He fixed thee mid this dance  
 Of plastic circumstance,  
 This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest: 165  
 Machinery just meant  
 To give thy soul its bent,  
 Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

## XXIX

What though the earlier grooves  
 Which ran the laughing loves 170  
 Around thy base, no longer pause and press?  
 What though, about thy rim,  
 Skull-things in order grim  
 Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

## XXX

Look not thou down but up! 175  
 To uses of a cup,  
 The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,  
 The new wine's foaming flow,  
 The Master's lips a-glow!  
 Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou with earth's  
 wheel? 180

160. *What entered into thee*: This Neo-Platonic doctrine that the soul existed before birth is found in Ibn Ezra.

## XXXI

But I need, now as then,  
 Thee, God, who moulded men;  
 And since, not even while the whirl was worst,  
 Did I,—to the wheel of life  
 With shapes and colours rife,  
 Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst: 185

## XXXII

So, take and use Thy work:  
 Amend what flaws may lurk,  
 What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!  
 My times be in Thy hand! 190  
 Perfect the cup as planned!  
 Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!

## A DEATH IN THE DESERT\*

[SUPPOSED of Pamphylax the Antiochene:  
 It is a parchment, of my rolls the fifth,  
 Hath three skins glued together, is all Greek,  
 And goeth from *Epsilon* down to *Mu*:  
 Lies second in the surnamed Chosen Chest, 5  
 Stained and conserved with juice of terebinth,  
 Covered with cloth of hair, and lettered *Xi*,  
 From Xanthus, my wife's uncle now at peace:  
*Mu* and *Epsilon* stand for my own name.  
 I may not write it, but I make a cross 10  
 To show I wait His coming, with the rest,  
 And leave off here: beginneth Pamphylax.]

\* This poem is like several others that appeared with it in *Dramatis Personae* (1864) in giving Browning's views on current controversial topics, especially theological. Ostensibly the speaker is the aged St. John. But readers at the time would have recognized it as a reply to two lives of Jesus which had appeared within the past twelve months, Renan's *La Vie de Jésus* and Strauss's new *Leben Jesu*. See W. O. Raymond, "Browning and the Higher Criticism," *P.M.L.A.*, XLIV (1929), 590-621.

1-12. Pamphylax of Antioch is imaginary. (So are Xanthus, Valens, and Theotypas, mentioned later.)

4. *Epsilon*; *Mu*: letters E and M in the Greek alphabet.

6. *Terebinth*: turpentine.

I said, "If one should wet his lips with wine,  
 And slip the broadest plantain-leaf we find,  
 Or else the lappet of a linen robe, 15  
 Into the water-vessel, lay it right,  
 And cool his forehead just above the eyes,  
 The while a brother, kneeling either side,  
 Should chafe each hand and try to make it warm,—  
 He is not so far gone but he might speak." 20

This did not happen in the outer cave,  
 Nor in the secret chamber of the rock  
 Where, sixty days since the decree was out,  
 We had him, bedded on a camel-skin,  
 And waited for his dying all the while; 25  
 But in the midmost grotto: since noon's light  
 Reached there a little, and we would not lose  
 The last of what might happen on his face.

I at the head, and Xanthus at the feet,  
 With Valens and the Boy, had lifted him, 30  
 And brought him from the chamber in the depths,  
 And laid him in the light where we might see:  
 For certain smiles began about his mouth,  
 And his lids moved, presageful of the end.

Beyond, and half way up the mouth o' the cave, 35  
 The Bactrian convert, having his desire,  
 Kept watch, and made pretence to graze a goat  
 That gave us milk, on rags of various herb,  
 Plantain and quitch, the rocks' shade keeps alive:  
 So that if any thief or soldier passed, 40  
 (Because the persecution was aware)  
 Yielding the goat up promptly with his life,  
 Such man might pass on, joyful at a prize,  
 Nor care to pry into the cool o' the cave.  
 Outside was all noon and the burning blue. 45

23. By decree of some Roman emperor, the Christians are being persecuted.

36. *Bactrian*: from Bactria in ancient Persia.

39. *Quitch*: a tenacious grass.

“Here is wine,” answered Xanthus,—dropped a drop;  
I stooped and placed the lap of cloth aright,  
Then chafed his right hand, and the Boy his left:  
But Valens had bethought him, and produced  
And broke a ball of nard, and made perfume. 50  
Only, he did—not so much wake, as—turn  
And smile a little, as a sleeper does  
If any dear one call him, touch his face—  
And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.

Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept: 55  
It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,  
Was burned, and could not write the chronicle.

Then the Boy sprang up from his knees, and ran,  
Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought,  
And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead 60  
Out of the secret chamber, found a place,  
Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,  
And spoke, as ’t were his mouth proclaiming first,  
“I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

Whereat he opened his eyes wide at once, 65  
And sat up of himself, and looked at us;  
And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word:  
Only, outside, the Bactrian cried his cry  
Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,  
As signal we were safe, from time to time. 70

First he said, “If a friend declared to me,  
This my son Valens, this my other son,  
Were James and Peter,—nay, declared as well  
This lad was very John,—I could believe!  
—Could, for a moment, doubtlessly believe: 75  
So is myself withdrawn into my depths,  
The soul retreated from the perished brain  
Whence it was wont to feel and use the world

50. *Nard*: spikenard, a fragrant ointment.

Through these dull members, done with long ago.  
 Yet I myself remain; I feel myself: 80  
 And there is nothing lost. Let be, awhile!"

[This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,  
 How divers persons witness in each man,  
 Three souls which make up one soul: first, to wit,  
 A soul of each and all the bodily parts, 85  
 Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,  
 And has the use of earth, and ends the man  
 Downward: but, tending upward for advice,  
 Grows into, and again is grown into  
 By the next soul, which, seated in the brain, 90  
 Useth the first with its collected use,  
 And feeleth, thinketh, willeth,—is what Knows:  
 Which, duly tending upward in its turn,  
 Grows into, and again is grown into  
 By the last soul, that uses both the first, 95  
 Subsisting whether they assist or no,  
 And, constituting man's self, is what Is—  
 And leans upon the former, makes it play,  
 As that played off the first: and, tending up,  
 Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man 100  
 Upward in that dread point of intercourse,  
 Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him.  
 What Does, what Knows, what Is; three souls, one man.  
 I give the glossa of Theotypas.]

And then, "A stick, once fire from end to end: 105  
 Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark!  
 Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself  
 A little where the fire was: thus I urge  
 The soul that served me, till it task once more  
 What ashes of my brain have kept their shape, 110  
 And these make effort on the last o' the flesh,

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76-79. This Platonic assumption, that the real self merely makes use of the brain, was also taught by such contemporaries of Browning as Emerson and Arnold—not to mention orthodox Christians. It is appropriate in the mouth of a Platonist like St. John. In the note, added in brackets, lines 82-104, this is elaborated into a doctrine of three souls more peculiarly characteristic of the age in which St. John lived.

104. *Glossa*: explanatory note.

Trying to taste again the truth of things—"  
 (He smiled)—"their very superficial truth;  
 As that ye are my sons, that it is long  
 Since James and Peter had release by death, 115  
 And I am only he, your brother John,  
 Who saw and heard, and could remember all.  
 Remember all! It is not much to say.  
 What if the truth broke on me from above  
 As once and oft-times? Such might hap again: 120  
 Doubtlessly He might stand in presence here,  
 With head wool-white, eyes flame, and feet like brass,  
 The sword and the seven stars, as I have seen—  
 I who now shudder only and surmise  
 'How did your brother bear that sight and live?' 125

"If I live yet, it is for good, more love  
 Through me to men: be naught but ashes here  
 That keep awhile my semblance, who was John,—  
 Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth  
 No one alive who knew (consider this!) 130  
 —Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands  
 That which was from the first, the Word of Life.  
 How will it be when none more saith 'I saw'?"

"Such ever was love's way: to rise, it stoops.  
 Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden teach, 135  
 I went, for many years, about the world,  
 Saying 'It was so; so I heard and saw,'  
 Speaking as the case asked: and men believed.  
 Afterward came the message to myself  
 In Patmos isle; I was not bidden teach, 140  
 But simply listen, take a book and write,

122-3. See Revelation i, 14, 15.

125. *Your brother*: John referring to himself in the third person.

131-2. *Handled with his hand . . . the Word of Life*: touched Christ. In the Gospel by St. John, "the Word" (King James translation for the Greek *Logos* in i, 1) means "the Reason," which is identified with Christ. Browning often obliterates the dualist's sharp distinction between spiritual and physical. Cf. "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 71-2.

140. *Patmos*: island in the Aegean Sea. (Revelation i, 9.) Against the theory of Biblical critics like Renan and Strauss, Browning maintained that the book of Revelation was written by Christ's "beloved disciple" *John*.



Nor set down other than the given word,  
 With nothing left to my arbitrament  
 To choose or change: I wrote, and men believed.  
 Then, for my time grew brief, no message more, 145  
 No call to write again, I found a way,  
 And, reasoning from my knowledge, merely taught  
 Men should, for love's sake, in love's strength believe;  
 Or I would pen a letter to a friend  
 And urge the same as friend, nor less nor more: 150  
 Friends said I reasoned rightly, and believed.  
 But at the last, why, I seemed left alive  
 Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,  
 To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared  
 When there was mid-sea, and the mighty things; 155  
 Left to repeat, 'I saw, I heard, I knew,'  
 And go all over the old ground again,  
 With Antichrist already in the world,  
 And many Antichrists, who answered prompt  
 'Am I not Jasper as thyself art John? 160  
 Nay, young, whereas through age thou mayest forget:  
 Wherefore, explain, or how shall we believe?'  
 I never thought to call down fire on such,  
 Or, as in wonderful and early days,  
 Pick up the scorpion, tread the serpent dumb; 165  
 But patient stated much of the Lord's life  
 Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work:  
 Since much that at the first, in deed and word,  
 Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,  
 Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match, 170  
 Fed through such years, familiar with such light,  
 Guarded and guided still to see and speak)  
 Of new significance and fresh result;

142-4. Insisting that Revelation was dictated literally to the saint, whose human mind had nothing to do with deciding what to write, Browning is deliberately taking issue with the Biblical scholarship of his day, and with the liberal and modernist Christians.

149. The epistles of St. John.

156. "I saw"—and wrote the Fourth Gospel; "I heard"—and wrote Revelation; "I knew" ("reasoning from my knowledge" line 7)—and wrote the Epistles of John. In the next 20 lines Browning offers an explanation to meet the objection that the fourth was evidently written much later than the other three Gospels.

What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,  
 And named them in the Gospel I have writ. 175  
 For men said, 'It is getting long ago:  
 Where is the promise of His coming?'—asked  
 These young ones in their strength, as loth to wait,  
 Of me who, when their sires were born, was old.  
 I, for I loved them, answered, joyfully, 180  
 Since I was there, and helpful in my age;  
 And, in the main, I think such men believed.  
 Finally, thus endeavouring I fell sick,  
 Ye brought me here, and I supposed the end,  
 And went to sleep with one thought that, at least, 185  
 Though the whole earth should lie in wickedness,  
 We had the truth, might leave the rest to God.  
 Yet now I wake in such decrepitude  
 As I had slidden down and fallen afar,  
 Past even the presence of my former self, 190  
 Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,  
 Till I am found away from my own world,  
 Feeling for foothold through a blank profound,  
 Along with unborn people in strange lands,  
 Who say—I hear said or conceive they say— 195  
 'Was John at all, and did he say he saw?  
 Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!'

"And how shall I assure them? Can they share  
 —They, who have flesh, a veil of youth and strength  
 About each spirit, that needs must bide its time, 200  
 Living and learning still as years assist  
 Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see—  
 With me who hardly am withheld at all,  
 But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,  
 Lie bare to the universal prick of light? 205  
 Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,

194. He finds himself among the sceptics and Biblical scholars of France, Germany, and England in the nineteenth century, and proceeds to answer them.

199. See Plato's *Phaedo* for the theory that the body is a hindrance to knowledge of the truth; but contrast line 252. Reference to the truth, and to God, under the figure of *light* (line 205) is common in Plato and in the Johannine portions of the New Testament.

206. Cf. "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 2-3.

We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain ends too.  
 To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death  
 Of which I wrote 'it was'—to me, it is;  
 —Is, here and now: I apprehend naught else. 210  
 Is not God now i' the world His power first made?  
 Is not His love at issue still with sins  
 Visibly when a wrong is done on earth?  
 Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around?  
 Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise 215  
 To the right hand of the throne—what is it beside,  
 When such truth, breaking bounds, o'erfloods my soul,  
 And, as I saw the sin and death, even so  
 See I the need yet transiency of both,  
 The good and glory consummated thence? 220  
 I saw the power; I see the Love, once weak,  
 Resume the Power: and in this word 'I see,'  
 Lo, there is recognized the Spirit of both  
 That moving o'er the spirit of man, unblinds  
 His eye and bids him look. These are, I see; 225  
 But ye, the children, His beloved ones too,  
 Ye need,—as I should use an optic glass  
 I wondered at erewhile, somewhere i' the world,  
 It had been given a crafty smith to make;  
 A tube, he turned on objects brought too close, 230  
 Lying confusedly insubordinate  
 For the unassisted eye to master once:  
 Look through his tube, at distance now they lay,  
 Become succinct, distinct, so small, so clear!  
 Just thus, ye needs must apprehend what truth 235  
 I see, reduced to plain historic fact,  
 Diminished into clearness, proved a point  
 And far away: ye would withdraw your sense  
 From out eternity, strain it upon time,  
 Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death, 240  
 Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, disspread,

207. Cf. "Easter-Day," 99-100.

219. Brockington, in *Browning and the Twentieth Century*, points out (p. 193), "No New Testament writer sees the 'need' of sin and death." Cf. Browning's *Fifine at the Fair*, lines 1870-71:

"came discovery there was just

Enough and not too much of hate, love, greed and lust."

241. *Dispart*: spread apart.

As though a star should open out, all sides,  
Grow the world on you, as it is my world.

“For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,  
And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,— 245  
Is just our chance o’ the prize of learning love,  
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;  
And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost  
Such prize despite the envy of the world,  
And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all. 250  
But see the double way wherein we are led,  
How the soul learns diversely from the flesh!  
With flesh, that hath so little time to stay,  
And yields mere basement for the soul’s emprise,  
Expect prompt teaching. Helpful was the light, 255  
And warmth was cherishing and food was choice  
To every man’s flesh, thousand years ago,  
As now to yours and mine; the body sprang  
At once to the height, and stayed: but the soul,—no!  
Since sages who, this noontide, meditate 260  
In Rome or Athens, may descry some point  
Of the eternal power, hid yestereve;  
And, as thereby the power’s whole mass extends,  
So much extends the æther floating o’er,  
The love that tops the might, the Christ in God. 265  
Then, as new lessons shall be learned in these  
Till earth’s work stop and useless time run out,  
So duly, daily, needs provision be  
For keeping the soul’s prowess possible,  
Building new barriers as the old decay, 270  
Saving us from evasion of life’s proof,  
Putting the question ever, ‘Does God love,

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244-6. Hence, to Browning his love lyrics are an important part of his “philosophical” work.

249. Thus Browning would justify the apparent immoralism of “Respectability” and “The Statue and the Bust.”

265. *Christ in God*: of the three Persons in the Trinity. For Browning, Christ represents the Divine in its aspect as Love. (In its aspect as Reason—*Logos*—might seem closer to the Biblical John, but Browning repudiated reliance on reason.)

270-71. Barriers to direct knowledge of God’s truth are *desirable*, to exercise the prowess of the soul.

And will ye hold that truth against the world?'  
 Ye know there needs no second proof with good  
 Gained for our flesh from any earthly source: 275  
 We might go freezing, ages,—give us fire,  
 Thereafter we judge fire at its full worth,  
 And guard it safe through every chance, ye know!  
 That fable of Prometheus and his theft,  
 How mortals gained Jove's fiery flower, grows old 280  
 (I have been used to hear the pagans own)  
 And out of mind; but fire, howe'er its birth,  
 Here is it, precious to the sophist now  
 Who laughs the myth of Æschylus to scorn,  
 As precious to those satyrs of his play, 285  
 Who touched it in gay wonder at the thing.  
 While were it so with the soul,—this gift of truth  
 Once grasped, were this our soul's gain safe, and sure  
 To prosper as the body's gain is wont,—  
 Why, man's probation would conclude, his earth 290  
 Crumble; for he both reasons and decides,  
 Weighs first, then chooses: will he give up fire  
 For gold or purple once he knows its worth?  
 Could he give Christ up were His worth as plain?  
 Therefore, I say, to test man, the proofs shift, 295  
 Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact,  
 And straightway in his life acknowledge it,  
 As, say, the indubitable bliss of fire.  
 Sigh ye, 'It had been easier once than now'?  
 To give you answer I am left alive; 300  
 Look at me who was present from the first!  
 Ye know what things I saw; then came a test,

279. *Prometheus*: Titan who stole fire from Zeus (Jove) for the benefit of mankind.

284. *Æschylus*: Greek tragedian (525-456 B.C.) who wrote a trilogy on *Prometheus*.

290. To Browning the difficulty for the Christian lies not in living a good life but in *believing*. With the sceptics of the nineteenth century he agrees that the essentials of Christianity are "absurd" to the reason. But like Tertullian he would say, "I believe *because* it is absurd." This emphasis on the need for irrational belief has been, in the past, characteristic of extreme forms of Protestantism such as that of Browning's family background. It is not characteristic of Christian Platonists, who usually look to St. John for their very different philosophy.

My first, befitting me who so had seen:  
 'Forsake the Christ thou sawest transfigured, Him  
 Who trod the sea and brought the dead to life? 305  
 What should wring this from thee!'—ye laugh and ask.  
 What wrung it? Even a torchlight and a noise,  
 The sudden Roman faces, violent hands,  
 And fear of what the Jews might do! Just that,  
 And it is written, 'I forsook and fled:' 310  
 There was my trial, and it ended thus.  
 Ay, but my soul had gained its truth, could grow:  
 Another year or two,—what little child,  
 What tender woman that had seen no least  
 Of all my sights, but barely heard them told, 315  
 Who did not clasp the cross with a light laugh,  
 Or wrap the burning robe round, thanking God?  
 Well, was truth safe for ever, then? Not so.  
 Already had begun the silent work  
 Whereby truth, deadened of its absolute blaze, 320  
 Might need love's eye to pierce the o'erstretched doubt.  
 Teachers were busy, whispering 'All is true  
 As the aged ones report: but youth can reach  
 Where age gropes dimly, weak with stir and strain,  
 And the full doctrine slumbers till to-day.' 325  
 Thus, what the Roman's lowered spear was found,  
 A bar to me who touched and handled truth,  
 Now proved the glozing of some new shrewd tongue,  
 This Ebion, this Cerinthus or their mates,  
 Till imminent was the outcry 'Save our Christ!' 330  
 Whereon I stated much of the Lord's life  
 Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.  
 Such work done, as it will be, what comes next?  
 What do I hear say, or conceive men say,  
 'Was John at all, and did he say he saw?' 335  
 Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!

328. *Glozing*: comment.

329. Cerinthus was associated with the Ebionites who, according to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, "obstinately rejected the preceding existence and divine perfections of the Logos, or Son of God, which are so clearly defined in the Gospel of St. John." Browning has in mind modern parallels.

"Is this indeed a burthen for late days,  
 And may I help to bear it with you all,  
 Using my weakness which becomes your strength?  
 For if a babe were born inside this grot, 340  
 Grew to a boy here, heard us praise the sun,  
 Yet had but yon sole glimmer in light's place,—  
 One loving him and wishful he should learn,  
 Would much rejoice himself was blinded first  
 Month by month here, so made to understand 345  
 How eyes, born darkling, apprehend amiss:  
 I think I could explain to such a child  
 There was more glow outside than gleams he caught,  
 Ay, nor need urge 'I saw it, so believe!'  
 It is a heavy burthen you shall bear 350  
 In latter days, new lands, or old grown strange,  
 Left without me, which must be very soon.  
 What is the doubt, my brothers? Quick with it!  
 I see you stand conversing, each new face,  
 Either in fields, of yellow summer eves, 355  
 On islets yet unnamed amid the sea;  
 Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico  
 Out of the crowd in some enormous town  
 Where now the larks sing in a solitude;  
 Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand 360  
 Idly conjectured to be Ephesus:  
 And no one asks his fellow any more  
 'Where is the promise of His coming?' but  
 'Was he revealed in any of His lives,  
 As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul?' 365

"Quick, for time presses, tell the whole mind out,  
 And let us ask and answer and be saved!  
 My book speaks on, because it cannot pass;  
 One listens quietly, nor scoffs but pleads  
 'Here is a tale of things done ages since; 370  
 What truth was ever told the second day?  
 Wonders, that would prove doctrine, go for naught.

361. *Ephesus*: ancient city of Asiatic Greece, now in ruins. Gibbon relates the story that "St. John and Cerinthus accidentally met in the public bath of Ephesus; but the apostle fled from the heretic lest the building should tumble on their heads."

Remains the doctrine, love; well, we must love,  
 And what we love most, power and love in one,  
 Let us acknowledge on the record here, 375  
 Accepting these in Christ: must Christ then be?  
 Has He been? Did not we ourselves make Him?  
 Our mind receives but what it holds, no more.  
 First of the love, then; we acknowledge Christ—  
 A proof we comprehend His love, a proof 380  
 We had such love already in ourselves,  
 Knew first what else we should not recognize.  
 'T is mere projection from man's inmost mind,  
 And, what he loves, thus falls reflected back,  
 Becomes accounted somewhat out of him; 385  
 He throws it up in air, it drops down earth's,  
 With shape, name, story added, man's old way.  
 How prove you Christ came otherwise at least?  
 Next try the power: He made and rules the world:  
 Certes there is a world once made, now ruled, 390  
 Unless things have been ever as we see.  
 Our sires declared a charioteer's yoked steeds  
 Brought the sun up the east and down the west,  
 Which only of itself now rises, sets,  
 As if a hand impelled it and a will,— 395  
 Thus they long thought, they who had will and hands:  
 But the new question's whisper is distinct,  
 Wherefore must all force needs be like ourselves?  
 We have the hands, the will; what made and drives  
 The sun is force, is law, is named, not known, 400  
 While will and love we do know; marks of these,  
 Eye-witnesses attest, so books declare—  
 As that, to punish or reward our race,  
 The sun at undue times arose or set  
 Or else stood still: what do not men affirm? 405  
 But earth requires as urgently reward

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380-421. John is quoting someone who might object that it is merely anthropomorphic superstition to create a god by projecting outside ourselves an idealization of love or an assumption of a personal will, both of which are, so far as we know, merely human. In 494-513 the poet attacks this view, not so much by trying to reason against it as by asserting that anyone is spiritually dead who fails to admit that there is an analogy here requiring belief.



Or punishment to-day as years ago,  
 And none expects the sun will interpose:  
 Therefore it was mere passion and mistake,  
 Or erring zeal for right, which changed the truth. 410  
 Go back, far, farther, to the birth of things;  
 Ever the will, the intelligence, the love,  
 Man's!—which he gives, supposing he but finds,  
 As late he gave head, body, hands and feet,  
 To help these in what forms he called his gods. 415  
 First, Jove's brow, Juno's eyes were swept away,  
 But Jove's wrath, Juno's pride continued long;  
 As last, will, power, and love discarded these,  
 So law in turn discards power, love, and will.  
 What proveth God is otherwise at least? 420  
 All else, projection from the mind of man!

"Nay, do not give me wine, for I am strong,  
 But place my gospel where I put my hands.

"I say that man was made to grow, not stop;  
 That help, he needed once, and needs no more, 425  
 Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:  
 For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.  
 This imports solely, man should mount on each  
 New height in view; the help whereby he mounts,  
 The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall, 430  
 Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.  
 Man apprehends Him newly at each stage  
 Whereat earth's ladder drops, its service done;  
 And nothing shall prove twice what once was proved.  
 You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs 435  
 To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,  
 And check the careless step would spoil their birth;  
 But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go,  
 Since should ye doubt of virtues, question kinds,  
 It is no longer for old twigs ye look, 440  
 Which proved once underneath lay store of seed,  
 But to the herb's self, by what light ye boast,

434-465. Browning uses the nineteenth-century faith in progress to justify the older Protestant belief that miracles no longer occur but did occur in Biblical times.

For what fruit's signs are. This book's fruit is plain,  
 Nor miracles need prove it any more.  
 Doth the fruit show? Then miracles bade 'ware 445  
 At first of root and stem, saved both till now  
 From trampling ox, rough boar and wanton goat.  
 What? Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,  
 And be discharged, and straight wound up anew?  
 No!—grown, his growth lasts; taught, he ne'er forgets: 450  
 May learn a thousand things, not twice the same.

"This might be pagan teaching: now hear mine.

"I say, that as the babe, you feed awhile,  
 Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,  
 So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth: 455  
 When they can eat, babe's-nurture is withdrawn.  
 I fed the babe whether it would or no:  
 I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.  
 I cried once, 'That ye may believe in Christ,  
 Behold this blind man shall receive his sight!' 460  
 I cry now, 'Urgest thou, for I am shrewd  
*And smile at stories how John's word could cure—  
 Repeat that miracle and take my faith?*'  
 I say, that miracle was duly wrought  
 When, save for it, no faith was possible. 465  
 Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o' the world,  
 Whether the change came from our minds which see  
 Of shows o' the world so much as and no more  
 Than God wills for His purpose,—(what do I  
 See now, suppose you, there where you see rock 470  
 Round us?—I know not; such was the effect,  
 So faith grew, making void more miracles  
 Because too much: they would compel, not help.  
 I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ  
 Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee 475  
 All questions in the earth and out of it,  
 And has so far advanced thee to be wise.  
 Wouldst thou unprove this to re-prove the proved?

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478. Cf. Newman, *Grammar of Assent* (Longmans ed. p. 229), "it is our duty, deliberately to take things for granted which our forefathers had a duty to doubt about: and unless we summarily put down disputation on

In life's mere minute, with power to use that proof,  
 Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung?  
 Thou hast it; use it and forthwith, or die! 480

"For I say, this is death and the sole death,  
 When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,  
 Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,  
 And lack of love from love made manifest; 485  
 A lamp's death when, replete with oil, it chokes;  
 A stomach's when, surcharged with food, it starves.  
 With ignorance was surety of a cure.  
 When man, appalled at nature, questioned first,  
 'What if there lurk a might behind this might?' 490  
 He needed satisfaction God could give,  
 And did give, as ye have the written word:  
 But when he finds might still redouble might,  
 Yet asks, 'Since all is might, what use of will?'  
 —Will, the one source of might,—he being man 495  
 With a man's will and a man's might, to teach  
 In little how the two combine in large,—  
 That man has turned round on himself and stands,  
 Which in the course of nature is, to die.

"And when man questioned, 'What if there be love  
 Behind the will and might, as real as they?'— 500  
 He needed satisfaction God could give,  
 And did give, as ye have the written word:  
 But when, beholding that love everywhere,  
 He reasons, 'Since such love is everywhere, 505  
 And since ourselves can love and would be loved,  
 We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,'—  
 How shall ye help this man who knows himself,  
 That he must love and would be loved again,  
 Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ, 510

points which have been already proved and ruled, we should waste our time, and make no advances." In *The Ariens of the Fourth Century* Newman applies this to science, arguing that in physics we must take Newton as an authority, and not doubt his conclusions.

482-485. Here Browning preaches in an abstract formula what he presents more artistically and humorously in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," where he shows this concretely embodied in character.

Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him?  
 The lamp o'erswims with oil, the stomach flags  
 Loaded with nurture, and that man's soul dies.

"If he rejoin, 'But this was all the while  
 A trick; the fault was, first of all, in thee,  
 Thy story of the places, names and dates,  
 Where, when and how the ultimate truth had rise,  
 —Thy prior truth, at last discovered none,  
 Whence now the second suffers detriment.  
 What good of giving knowledge if, because  
 O' the manner of the gift, its profit fail?  
 And why refuse what modicum of help  
 Had stopped the after-doubt, impossible  
 I' the face of truth—truth absolute, uniform?  
 Why must I hit of this and miss of that,  
 Distinguish just as I be weak or strong,  
 And not ask of thee and have answer prompt,  
 Was this once, was it not once?—then and now  
 And evermore, plain truth from man to man.  
 Is John's procedure just the heathen bard's?  
 Put question of his famous play again  
 How for the ephemerals' sake, Jove's fire was filched,  
 And carried in a cane and brought to earth:  
*The fact is in the fable, cry the wise,  
 Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,  
 Though fire be spirit and produced on earth.*  
 As with the Titan's, so now with thy tale:  
 Why breed in us perplexity, mistake,  
 Nor tell the whole truth in the proper words?"

"I answer, Have ye yet to argue out  
 The very primal thesis, plainest law,  
 —Man is not God but hath God's end to serve,  
 A master to obey, a course to take,

530-31. *Heathen bard's . . . famous play: Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound.*

542-551. This is perhaps Browning's most direct repudiation of any view which makes man the measure of all things or sets up human ends as a guide to life.

Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become?  
 Grant this, then man must pass from old to new, 545  
 From vain to real, from mistake to fact,  
 From what once seemed good, to what now proves best.  
 How could man have progression otherwise?  
 Before the point was mooted 'What is God?'  
 No savage man inquired 'What am myself?' 550  
 Much less replied, 'First, last, and best of things.'  
 Man takes that title now if he believes  
 Might can exist with neither will nor love,  
 In God's case—what he names now Nature's Law—  
 While in himself he recognizes love 555  
 No less than might and will: and rightly takes.  
 Since if man prove the sole existent thing  
 Where these combine, whatever their degree,  
 However weak the might or will or love,  
 So they be found there, put in evidence,— 560  
 He is as surely higher in the scale  
 Than any might with neither love nor will,  
 As life, apparent in the poorest midge,  
 (When the faint dust-speck flits, ye guess its wing)  
 Is marvellous beyond dead Atlas' self— 565  
 Given to the nobler midge for resting-place!  
 Thus, man proves best and highest—God, in fine,  
 And thus the victory leads but to defeat,  
 The gain to loss, best rise to the worst fall,  
 His life becomes impossible, which is death. 570

"But if, appealing thence, he cower, avouch  
 He is mere man, and in humility  
 Neither may know God nor mistake himself;  
 I point to the immediate consequence  
 And say, by such confession straight he falls 575  
 Into man's place, a thing nor God nor beast,  
 Made to know that he can know and not more:

552-562. Compare "Saul," lines 300 ff., and "Epistle of Karshish," lines 305 ff. (and note). Browning makes St. John reverse the position of 1 John iv, II ("if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another").

565. *Atlas*: mountain range in northern Africa.

571. *Cower*: shrink quivering from fear (of God, a "master to obey," l. 543).

Lower than God who knows all and can all,  
Higher than beasts which know and can so far  
As each beast's limit, perfect to an end, 580  
Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more;  
While man knows partly but conceives beside,  
Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,  
And in this striving, this converting air  
Into a solid he may grasp and use, 585  
Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,  
Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,  
Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.  
Such progress could no more attend his soul  
Were all it struggles after found at first 590  
And guesses changed to knowledge absolute,  
Than motion wait his body, were all else  
Than it the solid earth on every side,  
Where now through space he moves from rest to rest.  
Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect 595  
He could not, what he knows now, know at first;  
What he considers that he knows to-day,  
Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown;  
Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns  
Because he lives, which is to be a man, 600  
Set to instruct himself by his past self:  
First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,  
Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,  
Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.  
God's gift was that man should conceive of truth 605  
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,  
As midway help till he reach fact indeed.  
The statuary ere he mould a shape  
Boasts a like gift, the shape's idea, and next  
The aspiration to produce the same; 610  
So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,  
Cries ever 'Now I have the thing I see':  
Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,  
From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.  
How were it had he cried 'I see no face, 615  
No breast, no feet i' the ineffectual clay'?  
Rather commend him that he clapped his hands,  
And laughed 'It is my shape and lives again!'

Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth,  
 Until yourselves applaud the flesh indeed 620  
 In what is still flesh-imitating clay.  
 Right in you, right in him, such way be man's!  
 God only makes the live shape at a jet.  
 Will ye renounce this pact of creatureship?  
 The pattern on the Mount subsists no more, 625  
 Seemed awhile, then returned to nothingness;  
 But copies, Moses strove to make thereby,  
 Serve still and are replaced as time requires:  
 By these, make newest vessels, reach the type!  
 If ye demur, this judgment on your head, 630  
 Never to reach the ultimate, angels' law,  
 Indulging every instinct of the soul  
 There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!

"Such is the burthen of the latest time.  
 I have survived to hear it with my ears, 635  
 Answer it with my lips: does this suffice?  
 For if there be a further woe than such,  
 Wherein my brothers struggling need a hand,  
 So long as any pulse is left in mine,  
 May I be absent even longer yet, 640  
 Plucking the blind ones back from the abyss,  
 Though I should tarry a new hundred years!"

But he was dead; 't was about noon, the day  
 Somewhat declining: we five buried him  
 That eve, and then, dividing, went five ways, 645  
 And I, disguised, returned to Ephesus.

By this, the cave's mouth must be filled with sand.  
 Valens is lost, I know not of his trace;  
 The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,  
 And could not write nor speak, but only loved: 650  
 So, lest the memory of this go quite,

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619. Cf. "*Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium,'*" 1323-5:  
     I'm ready to believe my very self—  
     That every cheat's inspired, and every lie  
     Quick with a germ of truth.

623. *Jet*: spurt.

Seeing that I to-morrow fight the beasts,  
 I tell the same to Phœbas, whom believe!  
 For many look again to find that face,  
 Beloved John's to whom I ministered, 655  
 Somewhere in life about the world; they err:  
 Either mistaking what was darkly spoke  
 At ending of his book, as he relates,  
 Or misconceiving somewhat of this speech  
 Scattered from mouth to mouth, as I suppose. 660  
 Believe ye will not see him any more  
 About the world with his divine regard!  
 For all was as I say, and now the man  
 Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

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[Cerinthus read and mused; one added this: 665

"If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men  
 Mere man, the first and best but nothing more,—  
 Account Him, for reward of what He was,  
 Now and for ever, wretchedest of all.  
 For see; Himself conceived of life as love, 670  
 Conceived of love as what must enter in,  
 Fill up, make one with His each soul He loved  
 Thus much for man's joy, all men's joy for Him.  
 Well, He is gone, thou sayest, to fit reward.  
 But by this time are many souls set free, 675  
 And very many still retained alive:  
 Nay, should His coming be delayed awhile,  
 Say, ten years longer (twelve years, some compute)  
 See if, for every finger of thy hands,  
 There be not found, that day the world shall end, 680  
 Hundreds of souls, each holding by Christ's word  
 That He will grow incorporate with all,  
 With me as Pamphylax, with him as John,  
 Groom for each bride! Can a mere man do this?  
 Yet Christ saith, this He lived and died to do. 685  
 Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,  
 Or lost!"

But 't was Cerinthus that is lost.]



# CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS; OR, NATURAL THEOLOGY IN THE ISLAND\*

"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself."

[WILL sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,  
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,  
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin.  
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,  
And feels about his spine small eft-things course, 5  
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh:  
And while above his head a pompion-plant,  
Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,  
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,

\* Caliban is a primitive man, or perhaps even the "missing link" between ape and *homo sapiens* which was being talked about after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). (This poem appeared in the *Dramatis Personae* of 1864, which was largely concerned with ideas of current interest.) Caliban's name, character, and situation are taken from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, where he represents the savage Carib ("Caribal," or "Canibal" in Spanish), inhabitant of the Caribbean Isles in the New World. (His very name is made up of the letters of "Can(n)ibal.") Shakespeare's presentation of this example of "Natural Man" is much closer to the scientific conclusions of modern investigations than to the sentimentalized Noble Savage of the Romantics. Browning gives us this creature's primitive speculations concerning the nature of his god, Setebos. Caliban, like David in "Saul," creates his god in his own image; but where David, a man of up-welling affection, has faith that God is Love, Caliban assumes a cruel, savage, arbitrary god. Thus Browning satirizes one of the anthropomorphic elements in religion, and perhaps implies that "natural theology"—the attempt to define the nature of God by purely rationalistic speculation from the evidence of Nature—is always likely to fall into the same pit.

The name also suggests the French pronunciation of Calvin, the French theologian and Reformer whose doctrines of predestination and election are close to those of Caliban. Browning himself was of Calvinistic origin and obviously has in mind such doctrines as the following from the Westminster Confession of Faith: "The rest of mankind [all but the elect] God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious grace" (III, 7). But Caliban also feels that his god is inferior to a higher power which he calls "Quiet."

Motto: From Psalms, I, 21.

*Pompion-plant*: wild vine of the pumpkin family.

And now a flower drops with a bee inside,  
 And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch,—  
 He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross  
 And recross till they weave a spider-web  
 (Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)  
 And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,  
 Touching that other, whom his dam called God.  
 Because to talk about Him, vexes—ha,  
 Could He but know! and time to vex is now,  
 When talk is safer than in winter-time  
 Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep  
 In confidence he drudges at their task,  
 And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,  
 Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech.]

Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!  
 'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.

'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,  
 But not the stars; the stars came otherwise;  
 Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:  
 Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,  
 And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease:  
 He hated that He cannot change His cold,  
 Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish  
 That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,  
 And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine

11. Notice Browning's realism, making Caliban seem animal-like.

20. Prosper and Miranda are the only human beings he knows.

23. After the introductory description in brackets—and perhaps even in that part too—Caliban is the speaker. He refers to himself in the third person, either omitting the pronoun or using "he" (not capitalized—to be distinguished from "He" used of the god Setebos). Browning implies by this that the primitive man, like the animal, has not yet developed a sense of his own individual personality.

24. Setebos is the god of Caliban's mother (Sycorax) in the *Tempest*. Shakespeare had probably read in Eden's *History of Travaile* (1577) that the Patagonian Indians worshipped "Settaboth," "that is to say, the great devil." The kind of god that Caliban assumes does act like a great devil. Compare Hardy's conception of God.

O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,  
 A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave;  
 Only, she ever sickened, found repulse  
 At the other kind of water, not her life,  
 (Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun) 40  
 Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,  
 And in her old bounds buried her despair,  
 Hating and loving warmth alike: so He.

"Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,  
 Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing. 45  
 Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech;  
 Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,  
 That floats and feeds; a certain badger brown  
 He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye  
 By moonlight; and the pie with the long tongue 50  
 That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,  
 And says a plain word when she finds her prize,  
 But will not eat the ants; the ants themselves  
 That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks  
 About their hole—He made all these and more, 55  
 Made all we see, and us, in spite: how else?  
 He could not, Himself, make a second self  
 To be His mate; as well as have made Himself:  
 He would not make what He mislikes or slights,  
 An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains: 60  
 But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,  
 Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be—  
 Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,  
 Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,  
 Things He admires and mocks too,—that is it. 65  
 Because, so brave, so better though they be,  
 It nothing skills if He begin to plague.  
 Look now, I melt a gourd-fruit into mash,  
 Add honeycomb and pods, I have perceived,  
 Which bite like finches when they bill and kiss,— 70  
 Then, when froth rises bladdery, drink up all,

46. *Lithe as a leech*: Caliban's very figures of speech show that his mind is full of grotesque and loathsome objects—an illustration of Browning's psychological and artistic method in the dramatic monologue.

50. *Pie*: magpie.

Quick, quick, till maggots scamper through my brain;  
 Last, throw me on my back i' the seeded thyme,  
 And wanton, wishing I were born a bird.  
 Put case, unable to be what I wish, 75  
 I yet could make a live bird out of clay:  
 Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban  
 Able to fly?—for, there, see, he hath wings,  
 And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,  
 And there, a sting to do his foes offence, 80  
 There, and I will that he begin to live,  
 Fly to yon rock-top, nip me off the horns  
 Of grigs high up that make the merry din,  
 Saucy through their veined wings, and mind me not.  
 In which feat, if his leg snapped, brittle clay, 85  
 And he lay stupid-like,—why, I should laugh;  
 And if he, spying me, should fall to weep,  
 Beseech me to be good, repair his wrong,  
 Bid his poor leg smart less or grow again,—  
 Well, as the chance were, this might take or else 90  
 Not take my fancy: I might hear his cry,  
 And give the mankin three sound legs for one,  
 Or pluck the other off, leave him like an egg,  
 And lessoned he was mine and merely clay.  
 Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme, 95  
 Drinking the mash, with brain become alive,  
 Making and marring clay at will? So He.

'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him,  
 Nor kind, nor cruel: He is strong and Lord.  
 'Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs 100  
 That march now from the mountain to the sea,  
 'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,  
 Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.  
 'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots  
 Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off; 105  
 'Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,  
 And two worms he whose nippers end in red;  
 As it likes me each time, I do: so He.

75. *Put case*: assume that.

83. *Grigs*: grasshoppers or crickets.

Well then, 'supposeth He is good i' the main,  
 Placable if His mind and ways were guessed, 110  
 But rougher than His handiwork, be sure!  
 Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,  
 And envieth that, so helped, such things do more  
 Than He who made them! What consoles but this?  
 That they, unless through Him, do naught at all, 115  
 And must submit: what other use in things?  
 'Hath cut a pipe of pithless elder joint  
 That, blown through, gives exact the scream o' the jay  
 When from her wing you twitch the feathers blue:  
 Sound this, and little birds that hate the jay 120  
 Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt:  
 Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth  
 "I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,  
 I make the cry my maker cannot make  
 With his great round mouth; he must blow through mine!" 125  
 Would not I smash it with my foot? So He.

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease?  
 Aha, that is a question! Ask, for that,  
 What knows,—the something over Setebos  
 That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought, 130  
 Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.  
 There may be something quiet o'er His head,  
 Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,  
 Since both derive from weakness in some way.  
 I joy because the quails come; would not joy 135  
 Could I bring quails here when I have a mind:  
 This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth.  
 'Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,  
 But never spends much thought nor care that way.  
 It may look up, work up,—the worse for those 140  
 It works on! 'Careth but for Setebos  
 The many-handed as a cuttle-fish,  
 Who, making Himself feared through what He does,

128-149. Setebos is something of a Platonic demiurge, creating the world in imitation of eternal and perfect ideas. Quiet, on the other hand, is more like Aristotle's God, an Unmoved Mover. To say that Caliban thinks like Plato, Aristotle, and Calvin does not mean that Browning committed gross anachronism. The poet means to say that the natural man's reasoning leads him to these beliefs and that (without revelation) there is

Looks up, first, and perceives he cannot soar  
 To what is quiet and hath happy life; 145  
 Next looks down here, and out of very spite  
 Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real,  
 These good things to match those as hips do grapes.  
 'Tis solace making baubles, ay, and sport.  
 Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books 150  
 Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle:  
 Vexed, 'stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped,  
 Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words;  
 Has peeled a wand and called it by a name;  
 Weareth at whiles for an enchanter's robe 155  
 The eyed skin of a supple oncelot;  
 And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,  
 A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,  
 Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,  
 And saith she is Miranda and my wife: 160  
 'Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane  
 He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge;  
 Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,  
 Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,  
 And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge 165  
 In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban;  
 A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.  
 'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,  
 Taketh his mirth with make-believes: so He.

less difference than we would like to think between highly civilized philosophy and primitive superstition. Browning finds much of Caliban in himself—for example, Browning loved "small eft-things" (*Cf. Letters*, I, 368).

142. Notice the casual reference to the physical appearance of Setebos, as hideous as an African or a Hindu god.

148. *Hips*: hard round fruit of wild briar. *Cf.* note to 128-49, and compare the very different expression of this Platonic conception in Spenser's *Hymne in Honour of Beautie* (29-35):

What time this worlds great Work-maister did cast  
 To make all things such as we now behold,  
 It seems that he before his eyes had plast  
 A goodly Paterne, to whose perfect mould  
 He fashioned them as comely as he could,  
 That now so faire and seemly they appeare,  
 As nought may be amended any where.

150. *Himself*: that is, I, Caliban.

156. *Oncelot*: a little ounce, which is somewhat like a leopard.

His dam held that the Quiet made all things 170  
 Which Setebos vexed only: 'holds not so.  
 Who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex.  
 Had He meant other, while His hand was in,  
 Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,  
 Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow, 175  
 Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,  
 Like an orc's armour? Ay,—so spoil His sport!  
 He is the One now: only He doth all.

'Saith, He may like, perchance, what profits Him.  
 Ay, himself loves what does him good; but why? 180  
 'Gets good no otherwise. This blinded beast  
 Loves whoso places flesh-meat on his nose,  
 But, had he eyes, would want no help, but hate  
 Or love, just as it liked him: He hath eyes.  
 Also it pleaseth Setebos to work, 185  
 Use all His hands, and exercise much craft,  
 By no means for the love of what is worked.  
 'Tasteth, himself, no finer good i' the world  
 When all goes right, in this safe summer-time,  
 And he wants little, hungers, aches not much, 190  
 Than trying what to do with wit and strength.  
 'Falls to make something: 'piled yon pile of turfs,  
 And squared and stuck there squares of soft white chalk,  
 And, with a fish-tooth, scratched a moon on each,  
 And set up endwise certain spikes of tree, 195  
 And crowned the whole with a sloth's skull a-top,  
 Found dead i' the woods, too hard for one to kill.  
 No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake;  
 'Shall some day knock it down again: so He.

'Saith He is terrible: watch His feats in proof! 200  
 One hurricane will spoil six good months' hope.  
 He hath a spite against me, that I know,  
 Just as He favours Prosper, who knows why?  
 So it is, all the same, as well I find.  
 'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm 205  
 With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises

Crawling to lay their eggs here: well, one wave,  
 Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,  
 Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,  
 And licked the whole labour flat: so much for spite. 210  
 'Saw a ball flame down late (yonder it lies)  
 Where, half an hour before, I slept i' the shade:  
 Often they scatter sparkles: there is force!  
 'Dug up a newt He may have envied once  
 And turned to stone, shut up inside a stone. 215  
 Please Him and hinder this?—What Prosper does?  
 Aha, if He would tell me how! Not He!  
 There is the sport: discover how or die!  
 All need not die, for of the things o' the isle  
 Some flee afar, some dive, some run up trees; 220  
 Those at His mercy,—why, they please Him most  
 When . . when . . well, never try the same way twice!  
 Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.  
 You must not know His ways, and play Him off,  
 Sure of the issue. 'Doth the like himself: 225  
 'Spareth a squirrel that it nothing fears  
 But steals the nut from underneath my thumb,  
 And when I threat, bites stoutly in defence:  
 'Spareth an urchin that contrariwise,  
 Curls up into a ball, pretending death 230  
 For fright at my approach: the two ways please.  
 But what would move my choler more than this,  
 That either creature counted on its life  
 To-morrow and next day and all days to come,  
 Saying, forsooth, in the inmost of its heart, 235  
 "Because he did so yesterday with me,  
 And otherwise with such another brute,  
 So must he do henceforth and always."—Ay?  
 Would teach the reasoning couple what "must" means!  
 'Doth as he likes, or wherefore Lord? So He. 240

'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,  
 And we shall have to live in fear of Him  
 So long as He lives, keeps His strength: no change,

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225. Caliban considers his god as arbitrary as himself; he does not necessarily reward obedience. Compare the Calvinistic belief that man cannot merit salvation by his own works. See the notes to "Johannes Agricola."



If He have done His best, make no new world  
 To please Him more, so leave off watching this,— 245  
 If He surprise not even the Quiet's self  
 Some strange day,—or, suppose, grow into it  
 As grubs grow butterflies: else, here are we,  
 And there is He, and nowhere help at all.

'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop. 250  
 His dam held different, that after death  
 He both plagued enemies and feasted friends:  
 Idly! He doth His worst in this our life,  
 Giving just respite lest we die through pain,  
 Saving last pain for worst,—with which, an end. 255  
 Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire  
 Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself,  
 Yonder two flies, with purple films and pink,  
 Bask on the pompion-bell above: kills both.  
 'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball 260  
 On head and tail as if to save their lives:  
 Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.

Even so, 'would have Him misconceive, suppose  
 This Caliban strives hard and ails no less,  
 And always, above all else, envies Him; 265  
 Wherefore he mainly dances on dark nights,  
 Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh,  
 And never speaks his mind save housed as now:  
 Outside, 'groans, curses. If He caught me here,  
 O'erheard this speech, and asked "What chucklest at?" 270  
 'Would, to appease Him, cut a finger off,  
 Or of my three kid yearlings burn the best,  
 Or let the toothsome apples rot on tree,  
 Or push my tame beast for the orc to taste:  
 While myself lit a fire, and made a song 275  
 And sung it, "*What I hate, be consecrate  
 To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate  
 For Thee; what see for envy in poor me?*"  
 Hoping the while, since evils sometimes mend,  
 Warts rub away and sores are cured with slime, 280

256-7. Another reference to Puritanism (British form of Calvinism).

260. *Painful*: taking pains.

That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch  
And conquer Setebos, or likelier He  
Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.

[What, what? A curtain o'er the world at once!  
Crickets stop hissing; not a bird—or, yes, 285  
There scuds His raven that has told Him all!  
It was fool's play, this prattling! Ha! The wind  
Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,  
And fast invading fires begin! White blaze—  
A tree's head snaps—and there, there, there, there, there, 290  
His thunder follows! Fool to gibe at Him!  
Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!  
'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,  
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month  
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!]

295

CONFESSIONS\*

I

WHAT is he buzzing in my ears?  
"Now that I come to die,  
Do I view the world as a vale of tears?"  
Ah, reverend sir, not I!

II

What I viewed there once, what I view again 5  
Where the physic bottles stand  
On the table's edge,—is a suburb lane,  
With a wall to my bedside hand.

III

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,  
From a house you could descry 10  
O'er the garden-wall: is the curtain blue  
Or green to a healthy eye?

\* Published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864). A dying man, supposed to be confessing, refuses to admit that the world is "a vale of tears" or to feel any regret for being "bad and mad." Instead, his imagination, still full of untamed energy, sees even the bottles of the sickroom as if they were the lane where he carried on a secret love affair.

## IV

To mine, it serves for the old June weather  
Blue above lane and wall;  
And that farthest bottle labelled "Ether" 15  
Is the house o'er-topping all.

## V

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,  
There watched for me, one June,  
A girl: I know, sir, it 's improper,  
My poor mind 's out of tune. 20

## VI

Only, there was a way . . . you crept  
Close by the side, to dodge  
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:  
They styled their house "The Lodge."

## VII

What right had a lounge up their lane? 25  
But, by creeping very close,  
With the good wall's help,—their eyes might strain  
And stretch themselves to Oes,

## VIII

Yet never catch her and me together,  
As she left the attic, there, 30  
By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether,"  
And stole from stair to stair,

## IX

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,  
We loved, sir—used to meet:  
How sad and bad and mad it was— 35  
But then, how it was sweet!

PROSPICE\*

FEAR death?—to feel the fog in my throat,  
 The mist in my face,  
 When the snows begin, and the blasts denote  
 I am nearing the place,  
 The power of the night, the press of the storm, 5  
 The post of the foe;  
 Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,  
 Yet the strong man must go:  
 For the journey is done and the summit attained,  
 And the barriers fall, 10  
 Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
 The reward of it all.  
 I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,  
 The best and the last!  
 I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore, 15  
 And bade me creep past.  
 No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers  
 The heroes of old,  
 Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears  
 Of pain, darkness and cold. 20  
 For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,  
 The black minute's at end,  
 And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,  
 Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
 Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain, 25  
 Then a light, then thy breast,  
 O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,  
 And with God be the rest!

\* First published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for June, 1864, and, at about the same time, in *Dramatis Personae*, the poem was written soon after the death of Mrs. Browning in June, 1861. It asserts Browning's belief in immortality. *Prospice*, pronounced *prōs' pī sē* (Webster), is Latin for "look forward." Browning says he would hate to have an easy death, but demands a chance for a struggle "like the heroes of old" whose equal he claims to be (17). He represents himself as "ever a fighter." Yet he asserts that the terrors he wants to undergo will last but a minute. In "Apparent Failure," of the same volume, he asserted "That what began best, can't end worst, Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst." Compare the "Epilogue to Asolando." Browning believes that there is really nothing to fear; and he is determined to face it with great courage. This inconsistency has not kept the poem from being much admired.

27. Addressed to his wife, who died in June, 1861.

## YOUTH AND ART\*

## I

It once might have been, once only:  
 We lodged in a street together,  
 You, a sparrow on the housetop lonely,  
 I, a lone she-bird of his feather.

## II

Your trade was with sticks and clay, 5  
 You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished,  
 Then laughed "They will see some day  
 Smith made, and Gibson demolished."

## III

My business was song, song, song;  
 I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered, 10  
 "Kate Brown's on the boards ere long,  
 And Grisi's existence embittered!"

## IV

I earned no more by a warble  
 Than you by a sketch in plaster;  
 You wanted a piece of marble, 15  
 I needed a music-master.

## V

We studied hard in our styles,  
 Chipped each at a crust like Hindoos,  
 For air looked out on the tiles,  
 For fun watched each other's windows. 20

\* Published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864). A woman regrets that during their youth they put their artistic ambitions first and failed to make "rash" or more than rash advances to each other. Similar themes are found in "Dis Aliter Visum," "The Statue and the Bust," etc. Saintsbury says, "The admirable lightness of 'Youth and Art,' half careless, half rueful, could not have been attained without audacious double rhymes" (*History of English Prosody*, London, 1910, III, 236).

8. John Gibson (1790-1866) was then considered one of England's greatest sculptors. Browning knew him well.

12. Giulia Grisi (1811-1869) was an Italian operatic soprano.

## VI

You lounged, like a boy of the South,  
 Cap and blouse—nay, a bit of beard too;  
 Or you got it, rubbing your mouth  
 With fingers the clay adhered to.

## VII

And I—soon managed to find 25  
 Weak points in the flower-fence facing,  
 Was forced to put up a blind  
 And be safe in my corset-lacing.

## VIII

No harm! It was not my fault 30  
 If you never turned your eye's tail up  
 As I shook upon E *in alt.*,  
 Or ran the chromatic scale up:

## IX

For spring bade the sparrows pair,  
 And the boys and girls gave guesses,  
 And stalls in our street looked rare 35  
 With bulrush and watercresses.

## X

Why did not you pinch a flower  
 In a pellet of clay and fling it?  
 Why did not I put a power 40  
 Of thanks in a look, or sing it?

## XI

I did look, sharp as a lynx,  
 (And yet the memory rankles)  
 When models arrived, some minx  
 Tripped up-stairs, she and her ankles.

## XII

But I think I gave you as good! 45  
 "That foreign fellow,—who can know  
 How she pays, in a playful mood,  
 For his tuning her that piano?"

31. E *in alt.* is high E.

## XIII

Could you say so, and never say  
 "Suppose we join hands and fortunes, 50  
 And I fetch her from over the way,  
 Her, piano, and long tunes and short tunes?"

## XIV

No, no: you would not be rash,  
 Nor I rasher and something over:  
 You've to settle yet Gibson's hash, 55  
 And Grisi yet lives in clover.

## XV

But you meet the Prince at the Board,  
 I'm queen myself at *bals-paré*,  
 I've married a rich old lord,  
 And you're dubbed knight and an R.A. 60

## XVI

Each life unfulfilled, you see;  
 It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:  
 We have not sighed deep, laughed free,  
 Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy.

## XVII

And nobody calls you a dunce, 65  
 And people suppose me clever:  
 This could but have happened once,  
 And we missed it, lost it for ever.

---

53-4. A characteristic moral in Browning's poetry: that they should have been "rash." Notice how remote Browning is from the Classical admiration for prudence or the Christian belief in the need for constant struggle to keep passion under restraint.

57. Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, was interested in art.

58. *Bals-paré*: fancy-dress balls.

60. R.A.: Member of the Royal Academy.

## A FACE\*

If one could have that little head of hers  
 Painted upon a background of pale gold,  
 Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers!  
 No shade encroaching on the matchless mould  
 Of those two lips, which should be opening soft 5  
 In the pure profile; not as when she laughs,  
 For that spoils all: but rather as if aloft  
 Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's  
 Burthen of honey-coloured buds to kiss  
 And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this. 10  
 Then her lithe neck, three fingers might surround,  
 How it should waver on the pale gold ground  
 Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts!  
 I know, Correggio loves to mass, in rifts  
 Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb 15  
 Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb:  
 But these are only massed there, I should think,  
 Waiting to see some wonder momentarily  
 Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky  
 (That 's the pale ground you 'd see this sweet face by), 20  
 All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one eye  
 Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink.

## A LIKENESS\*\*

SOME people hang portraits up  
 In a room where they dine or sup:  
 And the wife clinks tea-things under

---

\* On October 11, 1852, this poem was written in the album of the woman whose beauty it celebrates, the first wife of Coventry Patmore and the heroine of his *Angel in the House*, and other poems of wedded love. She was also much admired by the Pre-Raphaelite artists, by Tennyson, Ruskin, and Carlyle; but Mrs. Carlyle accused her of trying to look like Woolner's medallion of her. This poem was first printed in *Dramatis Personae* (1864).

3. *Tuscan's early art*: the painting of Medieval Florence, in Tuscany.

6. It was agreed that Mrs. Patmore lost her beauty when she laughed.

14. *Correggio*: Italian painter (1494-1534).

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\*\* Published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864). In the first two incidents others fail to appreciate the picture as much as the owner. But what if a



And her cousin, he stirs his cup,  
 Asks, "Who was the lady, I wonder?" 5  
 "'T is a daub John bought at a sale,"  
 Quoth the wife,—looks black as thunder:  
 "What a shade beneath her nose!  
 Snuff-taking, I suppose,—"  
 Adds the cousin, while John's corns ail. 10

Or else, there 's no wife in the case,  
 But the portrait 's queen of the place,  
 Alone mid the other spoils  
 Of youth,—masks, gloves and foils,  
 And pipe-sticks, rose, cherry-tree, jasmine, 15  
 And the long whip, the tandem-lasher,  
 And the cast from a fist ("not, alas! mine,  
 But my master's, the Tipton Slasher"),  
 And the cards where pistol-balls mark ace,  
 And a satin shoe used for cigar-case, 20  
 And the chamois-horns ("shot in the Chablais")  
 And prints—Rarey drumming on Cruiser,  
 And Sayers, our champion, the bruiser,  
 And the little edition of Rabelais:  
 Where a friend, with both hands in his pockets, 25  
 May saunter up close to examine it,  
 And remark a good deal of Jane Lamb in it,  
 "But the eyes are half out of their sockets;  
 That hair 's not so bad, where the gloss is,  
 But they 've made the girl's nose a proboscis: 30  
 Jane Lamb, that we danced with at Vichy!  
 What, is not she Jane? Then, who is she?"

All that I own is a print,  
 An etching, a mezzotint;

friend *did* appreciate an etching as much as he should? Then the owner would give it away, pleased with the appreciation but half in rage at the loss of his own sense of peculiar possession.

18. *Tipton Slasher*: a boxer from Tipton.

21. *Chablais*: French alpine district, on the south side of Lake Geneva.

22. J. S. Rarey was a famous tamer of horses, one of which was named "Cruiser."

23. Tom Sayers was a prize fighter who won the championship in 1857 and retired in 1860. The poem was probably written before the latter date.

'T is a study, a fancy, a fiction,  
 Yet a fact (take my conviction)  
 Because it has more than a hint  
     Of a certain face, I never  
 Saw elsewhere touch or trace of  
 In women I 've seen the face of:  
     Just an etching, and, so far, clever. 40

I keep my prints, an imbroglio,  
 Fifty in one portfolio.  
 When somebody tries my claret,  
 We turn round chairs to the fire,  
 Chirp over days in a garret, 45  
     Chuckle o'er increase of salary,  
 Taste the good fruits of our leisure,  
 Talk about pencil and lyre,  
     And the National Portrait Gallery:  
 Then I exhibit my treasure. 50  
 After we 've turned over twenty,  
     And the debt of wonder my crony owes  
     Is paid to my Marc Antonios,  
 He stops me—"Festina lentè!  
 What 's that sweet thing there, the etching?" 55  
 How my waistcoat-strings want stretching,  
     How my cheeks grow red as tomatos,  
 How my heart leaps! But hearts, after leaps, ache.

"By the by, you must take, for a keepsake, 60  
     That other, you praised, of Volpato's."  
 The fool! would he try a flight further and say—  
 He never saw, never before to-day,  
 What was able to take his breath away,  
 A face to lose youth for, to occupy age 65  
 With the dream of, meet death with,—why, I 'll not engage  
 But that, half in a rapture and half in a rage,  
 I should toss him the thing's self—" 'T is only a duplicate,  
 A thing of no value! Take it, I supplicate!"

42. *Imbroglio*: a confused mass.

54. *Marc Antonios*: engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi (c. 1490–c. 1530).

55. *Festina lentè*: make haste slowly.

61. Giovanni Volpato (c. 1735–1803) was an Italian engraver.

EPILOGUE TO *DRAMATIS PERSONAE*\*FIRST SPEAKER, *as David*

## I

ON the first of the Feast of Feasts,  
 The Dedication Day,  
 When the Levites joined the Priests  
 At the Altar in robed array,  
 Gave signal to sound and say,— 5

## II

When the thousands, rear and van,  
 Swarming with one accord  
 Became as a single man  
 (Look, gesture, thought and word)  
 In praising and thanking the Lord,— 10

## III

When the singers lift up their voice,  
 And the trumpets made endeavour,  
 Sounding, "In God rejoice!"  
 Saying, "In Him rejoice  
 Whose mercy endureth for ever!"— 15

## IV

Then the Temple filled with a cloud,  
 Even the House of the Lord;  
 Porch bent and pillar bowed:  
 For the presence of the Lord,  
 In the glory of His cloud, 20  
 Had filled the House of the Lord.

---

\* Browning had finished reading Renan's *La Vie de Jésus* in November, 1863, and this "Epilogue" to *Dramatis Personae* (1864) is an answer to such rationalism, a current of religious thought that was becoming more and more important. Meanwhile the Catholic Revival had also increased its influence, so that in the first section of this poem Browning has David give voice to a religion that is ritualistic, sacerdotal, emphasizing the Church as the special abode of God. In the third section the poet rejects both rationalism and Catholicism for his own religion of inner feeling. Cf. "Christmas Eve."

1. *Feast of Feasts*: Dedication of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings, viii, ix; 2 Chronicles, v, vi).

3. *Levites*: descendants of Levi, the sacred caste in Israel (most of them inferior to the Priests).

SECOND SPEAKER *as Renan*

Gone now! All gone across the dark so far,  
 Sharpening fast, shuddering ever, shutting still,  
 Dwindling into the distance, dies that star  
 Which came, stood, opened once! We gazed our fill 25  
 With upturned faces on as real a Face  
 That, stooping from grave music and mild fire,  
 Took in our homage, made a visible place  
 Through many a depth of glory, gyre on gyre,  
 For the dim human tribute. Was this true? 30  
 Could man indeed avail, mere praise of his,  
 To help by rapture God's own rapture too,  
 Thrill with a heart's red tinge that pure pale bliss?  
 Why did it end? Who failed to beat the breast,  
 And shriek, and throw the arms protesting wide, 35  
 When a first shadow showed the star addressed  
 Itself to motion, and on either side  
 The rims contracted as the rays retired;  
 The music, like a fountain's sickening pulse,  
 Subsided on itself; awhile transpired 40  
 Some vestige of a Face no pangs convulse,  
 No prayers retard; then even this was gone,  
 Lost in the night at last. We, lone and left  
 Silent through centuries, ever and anon  
 Venture to probe again the vault bereft 45  
 Of all now save the lesser lights, a mist  
 Of multitudinous points, yet suns, men say—  
 And this leaps ruby, this lurks amethyst,  
 But where may hide what came and loved our clay?  
 How shall the sage detect in yon expanse 50  
 The star which chose to stoop and stay for us?  
 Unroll the records! Hailed ye such advance  
 Indeed, and did your hope vanish thus?

---

22 ff. Ernest Renan (1823-92), French scholar and writer, was a leader in the Higher Criticism of the Bible. His *Life of Jesus* is a human interpretation of the life of Christ. Like Matthew Arnold (whom he greatly influenced) Renan tried to dispense with the supernatural in Christianity. Browning represents the sceptic feeling a regret over the loss of faith. Cf. Arnold's *Dover Beach* (1867).

26. *Face*: of Christ.

29. *Gyre*: spiral.

Watchers of twilight, is the worst averred?  
 We shall not look up, know ourselves are seen, 55  
 Speak, and be sure that we again are heard,  
 Acting or suffering, have the disk's serene  
 Reflect our life, absorb an earthly flame,  
 Nor doubt that, were mankind inert and numb,  
 Its core had never crimsoned all the same, 60  
 Nor, missing ours, its music fallen dumb?  
 Oh, dread succession to a dizzy post,  
 Sad sway of sceptre whose mere touch appals,  
 Ghastly dethronement, cursed by those the most  
 On whose repugnant brow the crown next falls! 65

## THIRD SPEAKER

## I

Witness alike of will and way divine,  
 How heaven's high with earth's low should intertwine!  
 Friends, I have seen through your eyes: now use mine!

## II

Take the least man of all mankind, as I;  
 Look at his head and heart, find how and why 70  
 He differs from his fellows utterly:

## III

Then, like me, watch when nature by degrees  
 Grows alive round him, as in Arctic seas  
 (They said of old) the instinctive water flees

## IV

Toward some elected point of central rock, 75  
 As though, for its sake only, roamed the flock  
 Of waves about the waste: awhile they mock

## V

With radiance caught for the occasion,—hues  
 Of blackest hell now, now such reds and blues  
 As only heaven could fitly interfuse,— 80

66 ff. The Third Speaker is Browning himself.

## VI

The mimic monarch of the whirlpool, king  
O' the current for a minute: then they wring  
Up by the roots and oversweep the thing,

## VII

And hasten off, to play again elsewhere  
The same part, choose another peak as bare, 85  
They find and flatter, feast and finish there.

## VIII

When you see what I tell you,—nature dance  
About each man of us, retire, advance,  
As though the pageant's end were to enhance

## IX

His worth, and—once the life, his product, gained— 90  
Roll away elsewhere, keep the strife sustained,  
And show thus real, a thing the North but feigned—

## X

When you acknowledge that one world could do  
All the diverse work, old yet ever new,  
Divide us, each from other, me from you,— 95

## XI

Why, where 's the need of Temple, when the walls  
O' the world are that? What use of swells and falls  
From Levites' choir, Priests' cries, and trumpet-calls?

## XII

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,  
Or decomposes but to recompose, 100  
Become my universe that feels and knows.

## THE FALL OF ATHENS

The beginning of

## ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY\*

WIND, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,  
 Balaustion, from—not sorrow but despair,  
 Not memory but the present and its pang!  
 Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart:  
 Never, while I live, may I see thee more, 5  
 Never again may these repugnant orbs  
 Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,  
 The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow  
 —Death's entry, Haides' outrage!  
 Doomed to die,—  
 Fire should have flung a passion of embrace 10  
 About thee till, resplendently inarmed,

\* This account of the fall of Athens, the first 176 lines of *Aristophanes' Apology* (1875), forms a unit in itself, constituting one of the poet's most beautiful dramatic monologues. But it is perhaps the least known of all, since it begins the sequel of one of Browning's most forbidding long poems, *Balaustion's Adventure*, read through by only a few readers who usually do not care to go on to the even more forbidding sequel. The 8416 lines of the two works embody an elaborate praise of Euripides for "his droppings of warm tears" (a phrase quoted by Browning from his wife's "Wine of Cyprus") and a prudish attack on Aristophanes. This passage can stand alone without reference to either book.

The tragic decay of Athenian civilization was portrayed at the time it was happening by some of the greatest authors the world has yet seen: Thucydides, the first historian and one of the greatest; Aristophanes himself in his unsurpassed realistic comedies, full of remarks on local sophists and politicians; and, by implication, in Plato's *Republic*, Books VIII, IX, when he describes the stages of degeneration a nation may go through. The Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.) was at last won by Athens' enemy, Sparta.

1–2. *Euthukles*: husband of Balaustion. The two have left Athens and are sailing to Rhodes. Balaustion, the speaker, is a Greek girl from the island of Rhodes, who had taken the side of Athens as long as there was any hope for the city. Browning's *Balaustion's Adventure*, 1871, tells how she saved her companions in Syracuse by reciting the *Alcestis* of Euripides, the Athenian dramatist. The subtitle of *Aristophanes' Apology* is *The Last Adventure of Balaustion*.)

4. *Athenai*: Athens, which in *Balaustion's Adventure* she called  
 "the life and light

Of the whole world worth calling world at all."

9. *Haides*: Pluto, god of the underworld.

(Temple by temple folded to his breast,  
 All thy white wonder fainting out in ash)  
 Lightly some vaporous sigh of soul escaped  
 And so the Immortals bade Athenai back! 15  
 Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,  
 Buried below Olumpos and its gods,  
 Akropolis to dominate her realm  
 For Koré, and console the ghosts; or, sea,  
 What if thy watery plural vastitude, 20  
 Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,  
 Might upon might, a moment,—stood, one stare,  
 Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave  
 Glassing that marbled last magnificence,—  
 Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the gray, 25  
 And when wave broke and overswarmed and, sucked  
 To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,  
 Let land again breathe unconfused with sea,  
 Attiké was, Athenai was not now!

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared. 30  
 But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs  
 To blinding,—bear me thence, bark, wind and wave!  
 Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,  
 Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,  
 Bear to my birthplace, Helios' island-bride, 35  
 Zeus' darling: thither speed us, homeward-bound,  
 Wafted already twelve hours' sail away  
 From horror, nearer by one sunset Rhodes!

Why should despair be? Since, distinct above  
 Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind 40

17. *Olumpos*: Olympus, a mountain in Thessaly, abode of the gods.

18. *Akropolis*: citadel of Athens.

19. *Koré*: a name under which Persephone, daughter of Demeter, was worshipped in Attica.

23. *Glaucous*: sea-green.

24. *Glassing*: reflecting.

29. *Attiké*: Attica, of which Athens was the capital.

34. *Pallas*: Athena, goddess of wisdom.

35. *Helios*: god of the Sun, especially worshipped at Rhodes. The Colossus of Rhodes was a gigantic statue of this god.

38. *Rhodes*: The easternmost island of the Aegean Sea.



And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul  
 Out of its fleshly durance dim and low,—  
 Since disembodied soul anticipates  
 (Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)  
 Above all crowding, crystal silentness, 45  
 Above all noise, a silver solitude:—  
 Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time  
 May permanently bide, "assert the wise,"  
 There live in peace, there work in hope once more—  
 O, nothing doubt, Philemon! Greed and strife, 50  
 Hatred and cark and care, what place have they  
 In yon blue liberality of heaven?  
 How the sea helps! How rose-smit earth will rise  
 Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be Rhodes!  
 Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant—in their name, 55  
 Believe—o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,  
 O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world  
 Extends that realm where, "as the wise assert,"  
 Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides  
 Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man! 60

A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep  
 Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,  
 Quieted out of weakness into strength.  
 I dare invite, survey the scene my sense  
 Staggered to apprehend: for, disinvolved 65  
 From the mere outside anguish and contempt,  
 Slowly a justice centred in a doom  
 Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,  
 Oppression met the oppressor and was matched.  
 Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence 70  
 Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low  
 Rampart and bulwark lay, as,—timing stroke

50. *Philemon*: a poet of the New Comedy, who had a very high opinion of Euripides. (This is an anachronism, since Philemon was not yet born.)

69. *Oppression*: The prosperity of Athens was based on imperialistic exploitation of her confederates.

70. *Sparté*: Sparta, the military power which had at last, in 404 B.C., won the Peloponnesian War, defeating Athens and destroying her defensive walls and her free government.

71. *Peiraios*: Piraeus, the harbor connected with Athens by the Long Walls.

Of hammer, axe, and beam hoist, poised and swung,—  
 The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,  
 In dance about the conquerer while he bade 75  
 Music and merriment help enginery  
 Batter down, break to pieces all the trust  
 Of citizens once, slaves now. See what walls  
 Play substitute for the long double range  
 Themistoklean, heralding a guest 80  
 From harbour on to citadel! Each side  
 Their senseless walls demolished stone by stone,  
 See,—outer wall as stonelike,—heads and hearts,—  
 Athenai's terror-stricken populace!  
 Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness,— 85  
 Braggarts, who wring hands wont to flourish swords—  
 Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,  
 (Argument dumb, authority a jest)

74 ff. Browning's description of the destruction of the Long Walls is from Plutarch's *Life of Lysander*: "Lysander, as soon as he had taken from the Athenians all their ships except twelve, and their walls, on the sixteenth of the month Munychion, the very day that they had overthrown the Barbarians in the sea-fight at Salamis, took measures at once to change their form of government. And when the Athenians opposed this bitterly, he sent word to the people that they had violated the terms of their surrender, for the walls were still standing though the time fixed for demolishing them was past; and since they had broken their agreement, he would present their case anew for consideration by the authorities. Some say that a proposal was actually made in the council of allies to sell the Athenians into slavery, and that Erianthus the Theban made a motion that the city be levelled with the ground, and the spot on which it stood turned into sheep-pasture. Afterwards, however, when the captains were gathered at a banquet, a certain man from Phocis sang the first chorus from Euripides' *Elektra* which begins

O daughter of Agamemnon

I come, Elektra, to thy rustic home.

They were greatly moved, and felt it to be a cruel deed to destroy such a famous city which produced such poets. Lysander, accordingly, the Athenians having yielded up everything, sent for many flute-girls from the city, and collecting all those who were already in the camp, tore down the walls and burned the ships, to the sound of the flute; while the allies crowned themselves with garlands and made merry together, counting that day the beginning of their liberty. Then he proceeded at once to alter the form of government, establishing thirty rulers in the city and ten in Piræus; he put a garrison into the Akropolis, and made Callibius, a Spartan, the governor of it."

79-80. Themistocles, Athenian general, fortified Athens.

Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,  
 Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout 90  
 O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,  
 Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite,—  
 Rivalities at truce now each with each,  
 Stupefied mud-banks,—such an use they serve!  
 While the one order which performs exact 95  
 To promise, functions faithful last as first,  
 What is it but the city's lyric troop,  
 Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl?  
 Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care  
 Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved, 100  
 But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads!  
 There let it grind to powder! Perikles!  
 The living are the dead now: death be life!  
 Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth? 105  
 Prove thee Olympian! If my heart supply  
 Inviolatè the structure,—true to type,  
 Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,  
 As Pheidias may inspire thee: slab on slab,  
 Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud, 110  
 Convert to gold yon west extravagance!

89. *Dikast*: judge; *heliast*: juryman.

101. *Kordax-step*: an indecent comic dance; to perform it sober and without a mask was regarded as a sign of shameless profligacy.

103. *Perikles*: ruler of Athens in her greatest period.

107-8. Compare Plato's *Republic* where the ideal city is said to exist "in idea only": "In heaven . . . there is laid up a pattern of it, methinks, which he who desires may behold, and beholding, may set his own house in order" (592 B, Jowett translation). But Browning, characteristically, reverses Platonism by using the actual city as the pattern on which to model the ideal type. Compare Shelley, *Hellas*, 1000 ff:

And now, O Victory, blush! and Empire, tremble  
 When ye desert the free—

If Greece must be

A wreck, yet shall its fragments reassemble,  
 And build themselves again impregnably

In a diviner clime,

To Amphionic music on some Cape sublime,  
 Which frowns above the idle foam of Time.

109. *Pheidias*: the greatest Athenian sculptor in the Age of Pericles.

'Neath Propulaia, from Akropolis  
 By vapoury grade and grade, gold all the way,  
 Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema-cloud,  
 Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through 115  
 That shall be better and more beautiful  
 And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn!  
 Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre  
 Predominates, one purple: Staghunt-month,  
 Brings it not Dionusia? Hail, the Three! 120  
 Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides  
 Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.  
 Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise—  
 Their noble want the unworthy,—as of old,  
 (How otherwise should patience crown their might?) 125  
 What if each find his ape promoted man,  
 His censor raised for antic service still?  
 Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,  
 Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,  
 Eruxis—I suspect, Euripides, 130  
 No brow will ache because with mop and mow  
 He gibes my poet! There 's a dog-faced dwarf  
 That gets to godship somehow, yet retains  
 His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,  
 More decent, indecorous just enough: 135  
 Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,  
 Grow Momos as thou Zeus? Or didst thou sigh

112. *Propulaia*: Propylaea, gateway of the Acropolis.

114. *Pnux*: Pnyx, the place at Athens for popular assemblies. *Bema*: elevated place where speeches were made.

115. *Hellas*: all Greek lands.

119. *Staghunt-month*: March, with its festival of Artemis, goddess of the chase.

120. *Dionusia*: the festival of Bacchus or Dionysus, when dramas were presented.

121. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are the greatest tragic dramatists in Greek literature.

128. *Hermippos*: poet of the Old Comedy who accused Aspasia, Pericles' mistress, of impiety.

129. *Kratinos*: Athenian comic poet satirized in Aristophanes' *Knights*.

130. *Eruxis*: a satirist mentioned in Aristophanes' *Frogs*.

131. *Mop and mow*: grimaces.

132. *Dog-faced dwarf*: the Egyptian god Anubis.

137. *Momos*: god of pleasantries, who satirized the gods.

Rightly with thy Makaria? "After life,  
 Better no sentiency than turbulence;  
 Death cures the low contention." Be it so! 140  
 Yet progress means contention, to my mind.

Euthukles, who, except for love that speaks,  
 Art silent by my side while words of mine  
 Provoke that foe from which escape is vain  
 Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall,— 145  
 Memories asleep as, at the altar-foot  
 Those Furies in the Oresteian song,—  
 Do I amiss, who wanting strength, use craft,  
 Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,  
 Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw? 150  
 That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,  
 Roots itself past upwrenching; but coaxed forth,  
 Encouraged out to practise fork and fang,—  
 Perhaps, when satiate with prompt sustenance,  
 It may pine, likelier die than if left swell 155  
 In peace by our pretension to ignore,  
 Or pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp  
 Bruise and not brain the pest.

A middle course!  
 What hinders that we treat this tragic theme  
 As the Three taught when either woke some woe, 160  
 —How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride  
 Of Iokasté, why Medeia clove  
 Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,  
 We felt our puny hates refine to air,  
 Our poor prides sink, prevent the humbling hand, 165

138. *Makaria*: a self-sacrificing heroine of Euripides' *Heracleidae*.

141. This sentiment is less Hellenic than Victorian.

147. *Those Furies*: Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megara, who haunted Orestes after he murdered his mother Clytemnestra.

161. *Klutaemnestra*: Clytemnestra, who murdered her husband Agamemnon upon his return from Troy; the central figure in *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus.

162. *Iokasté (Iocasté)*: Jocasta, mother and wife of Oedipus, in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. *Medeia*: Medea, heroine of Euripides' *Medea*; she murders her own children to take revenge on their father Jason.

Our petty passions purify their tide.  
 So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy  
 To re-enact itself, this voyage through,  
 Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!  
 Majestic on the stage of memory, 170  
 Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall  
 Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,  
 Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou!  
 What else in life seems piteous any more  
 After such pity, or proves terrible 175  
 Beside such terror?

## HOUSE\*

## I

SHALL I sonnet-sing you about myself?  
 Do I live in a house you would like to see?  
 Is it scant of gear, has it store of pelf?  
 "Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?"

## II

Invite the world, as my betters have done? 5  
 "Take notice: this building remains on view,  
 Its suites of reception every one,  
 Its private apartment and bedroom too;

## III

"For a ticket, apply to the Publisher."  
 No: thanking the public, I must decline. 10  
 A peep through my window, if folk prefer;  
 But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine!

166. Allusion to the theory of Aristotle's *Poetics* that tragic drama purifies the passions by *katharsis* or purgation.

171. *Peplosed*: robed; *kothorned*: buskined.

173. *Choros*: the chorus, the "ideal spectators" in a Greek tragedy.

\* In this poem, as in others of the *Pacchiarotto* volume (1876), Browning argues that everyone, even an author, has a right to privacy, and that his poems need not be taken as direct expressions of his own views but as dramatic presentations of other characters. Cf. "One Word More," where he says he will speak only that "once" for himself. But he spoke for himself at other times, and many of the ideas expressed by his dramatic characters are presented elsewhere as his own.

## IV

I have mixed with a crowd and heard free talk  
 In a foreign land where an earthquake chanced:  
 And a house stood gaping, nought to baulk 15  
 Man's eye wherever he gazed or glanced.

## V

The whole of the frontage shaven sheer,  
 The inside gaped: exposed to day,  
 Right and wrong and common and queer,  
 Bare, as the palm of your hand, it lay. 20

## VI

The owner? Oh, he had been crushed, no doubt!  
 "Odd tables and chairs for a man of wealth!  
 What a parcel of musty old books about!  
 He smoked,—no wonder he lost his health!

## VII

"I doubt if he bathed before he dressed. 25  
 A brasier?—the pagan, he burned perfumes!  
 You see it is proved, what the neighbours guessed:  
 His wife and himself had separate rooms."

## VIII

Friends, the Goodman of the house at least  
 Kept house to himself till an earthquake came: 30  
 'T is the fall of its frontage permits you feast  
 On the inside arrangement you praise or blame.

## IX

Outside should suffice for evidence:  
 And whoso desires to penetrate  
 Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense— 35  
 No optics like yours, at any rate!

24. DeVane thinks that Browning had in mind Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and that the whole poem is a protest against Rossetti's self-revealing sonnet sequence *The House of Life*, published in 1870 ("The Harlot and the Thoughtful Young Man," *Studies in Philology*, XXIX, 463-84). Browning's wife's revelation of their love in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* might be open to the same objections.

## X

"Hoity toity! A street to explore,  
 Your house the exception! '*With this same key*  
*Shakespeare unlocked his heart,*' once more!"  
 Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare hel 40

## SHOP\*

## I

So, friend, your shop was all your house!  
 Its front, astonishing the street,  
 Invited view from man and mouse  
 To what diversity of treat  
 Behind its glass—the single sheet! 5

## II

What gimcracks, genuine Japanese:  
 Gape-jaw and goggle-eye, the frog;  
 Dragons, owls, monkeys, beetles, geese;  
 Some crush-nosed human-hearted dog:  
 Queer names, too, such a catalogue! 10

38-9. The quotation is from Wordsworth's "Scorn not the Sonnet."

40. In his "Essay on Shelley" Browning chooses Shakespeare as the example of the "objective poet" (dramatic) as opposed to the self-revealing "subjective poet" like Shelley. "Shakespeare" has now become for Browning, *by definition*, that which he has come to represent in Browning's mind; and if the actual Shakespeare is not completely summed up in Browning's conception, then Shakespeare is not what Browning means by Shakespeare! This is a remarkable example of the use of a man's name not to mean the man according to what we know to be true about him, but as a term for an ideal to which certain emotions have been attached; and it may be related to Browning's method of arguing about religion, as in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," especially stanzas XXIV and XXV. Modern scholars more often agree with Wordsworth, that Shakespeare's sonnets are likely to be autobiographical. Cf. "*The Lost Leader*," 13.

\* A man should not be completely absorbed in his pursuit of worldly success but should have a private spiritual life, the poet says. Browning vividly suggests the business life of London, at a time when England was already very much commercialized. This was published in *Pacchiarotto* (1876); and because of other poems in that volume, such as "House," this may be taken to imply that the modern divorce between one's work and one's real life should be carried over into the vocation of literature, in contrast to the older conception that such a vocation is a way of life in itself. Browning seemed to many who met him more like a businessman than a poet.



## III

I thought "And he who owns the wealth  
 Which blocks the window's vastitude,  
 —Ah, could I peep at him by stealth  
 Behind his ware, pass shop, intrude  
 On house itself, what scenes were viewed! 15

## IV

"If wide and showy thus the shop,  
 What must the habitation prove?  
 The true house with no name a-top—  
 The mansion, distant one remove,  
 Once get him off his traffic-groove! 20

## V

"Pictures he likes, or books perhaps;  
 And as for buying most and best,  
 Commend me to these City chaps!  
 Or else he 's social, takes his rest  
 On Sundays, with a Lord for guest. 25

## VI

"Some suburb-palace, parked about  
 And gated grandly, built last year:  
 The four-mile walk to keep off gout;  
 Or big seat sold by bankrupt peer:  
 But then he takes the rail, that 's clear. 30

## VII

"Or, stop! I wager, taste selects  
 Some out o' the way, some all-unknown  
 Retreat: the neighbourhood suspects  
 Little that he who rambles lone  
 Makes Rothschild tremble on his throne!" 35

23. *City chaps*: business men, with the connotations Sinclair Lewis has given to "Babbitt." The "City" is the business center of London, and the English did not consider business a pursuit fit for a gentleman.

30. *Takes the rail*: takes the best position.

35. *Rothschild*: Jewish banking family for whom Browning's uncles had worked.

## VIII

Nowise! Nor Mayfair residence  
 Fit to receive and entertain,—  
 Nor Hampstead villa's kind defence  
 From noise and crowd, from dust and drain,—  
 Nor country-box was soul's domain! 40

## IX

Nowise! At back of all that spread  
 Of merchandize, woe 's me, I find  
 A hole i' the wall where, heels by head,  
 The owner couched, his ware behind,  
 —In cupboard suited to his mind. 45

## X

For why? He saw no use of life  
 But, while he drove a roaring trade,  
 To chuckle "Customers are rife!"  
 To chafe "So much hard cash outlaid  
 Yet zero in my profits made! 50

## XI

"This novelty costs pains, but—takes?  
 Cumbers my counter! Stock no more!  
 This article, no such great shakes,  
 Fizzes like wildfire? Underscore  
 The cheap thing—thousands to the fore!" 55

## XII

'T was lodging best to live most nigh  
 (Cramp, coffinlike as crib might be)  
 Receipt of Custom; ear and eye  
 Wanted no outworld: "Hear and see  
 The bustle in the shop!" quoth he. 60

## XIII

My fancy of a merchant-prince  
 Was different. Through his wares we groped

36. *Mayfair*: center of fashionable Society in the West End of London.

39. *Hampstead*: suburb of London.

40. *Country-box*: small country house.

Our darkling way to—not to mince  
 The matter—no black den where moped  
 The master if we interloped! 65

## XIV

Shop was shop only: household-stuff?  
 What did he want with comforts there?  
 "Walls, ceiling, floor, stay blank and rough,  
 So goods on sale show rich and rare!  
 '*Sell and scud home*' be shop's affair!" 70

## XV

What might he deal in? Gems, suppose!  
 Since somehow business must be done  
 At cost of trouble,—see, he throws  
 You choice of jewels, everyone,  
 Good, better, best, star, moon and sun! 75

## XVI

Which lies within your power of purse?  
 This ruby that would tip aright  
 Solomon's sceptre? Oh, your nurse  
 Wants simply coral, the delight  
 Of teething baby,—stuff to bite! 80

## XVII

Howe'er your choice fell, straight you took  
 Your purchase, prompt your money rang  
 On counter,—scarce the man forsook  
 His study of the "Times," just swang  
 Till-ward his hand that stopped the clang,— 85

## XVIII

Then off made buyer with a prize,  
 Then seller to his "Times" returned  
 And so did day wear, wear, till eyes  
 Brightened apace, for rest was earned:  
 He locked door long ere candle burned. 90

## XIX

And whither went he? Ask himself,  
 Not me! To change of scene, I think.

Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,  
 Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,  
 Nor all his music—money-chink. 95

## XX

Because a man has shop to mind  
 In time and place, since flesh must live,  
 Needs spirit lack all life behind,  
 All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,  
 All loves except what trade can give? 100

## XXI

I want to know a butcher paints,  
 A baker rhymes for his pursuit,  
 Candlestick-maker much acquaints  
 His soul with song, or, haply mute,  
 Blows out his brains upon the flute! 105

## XXII

But—shop each day and all day long!  
 Friend, your good angel slept, your star  
 Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!  
 From where these sorts of treasures are,  
 There should our hearts be—Christ, how far! 110

## FEARS AND SCRUPLES\*

## I

HERE's my case. Of old I used to love him  
 This same unseen friend, before I knew:  
 Dream there was none like him, none above him,—  
 Wake to hope and trust my dream was true.

## II

Loved I not his letters full of beauty? 5  
 Not his actions famous far and wide?  
 Absent, he would know I vowed him duty;  
 Present, he would find me at his side.

109-10. Referring to Matthew, vi, 21, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

\* Published in *Pacchiarotto* (1876). The application of the parable is revealed in the last line.

5. *Letters*: the Scriptures.

## III

Pleasant fancy! for I had but letters,  
 Only knew of actions by hearsay: 10  
 He himself was busied with my betters;  
 What of that? My turn must come some day.

## IV

"Some day" proving—no day! Here 's the puzzle.  
 Passed and passed my turn is. Why complain?  
 He 's so busied! If I could but muzzle 15  
 People's foolish mouths that give me pain!

## V

"Letters?" (hear them!) "You a judge of writing?  
 Ask the experts! How they shake the head  
 O'er these characters, your friend's inditing—  
 Call them forgery from A to Z! 20

## VI

"Actions? Where 's your certain proof" (they bother)  
 "He, of all you find so great and good,  
 He, he only, claims this, that, the other  
 Action—claimed by men, a multitude?"

## VII

I can simply wish I might refute you, 25  
 Wish my friend would,—by a word, a wink,—  
 Bid me stop that foolish mouth,—you brute you!  
 He keeps absent,—why, I cannot think.

## VIII

Never mind! Though foolishness may flout me,  
 One thing 's sure enough: 't is neither frost, 30  
 No, nor fire, shall freeze or burn from out me  
 Thanks for truth—though falsehood, gained—though lost.

## IX

All my days, I 'll go the softer, sadlier,  
 For that dream's sake! How forget the thrill  
 Through and through me as I thought "The gladlier 35  
 Lives my friend because I love him still!"

18. *Experts:* Higher Critics of the Bible, such as those at whom Browning directed the argument of "A Death in the Desert." See note to that poem.

## X

Ah, but there 's a menace some one utters!

"What and if your friend at home play tricks?

Peep at hide-and-seek behind the shutters?

Mean your eyes should pierce through solid bricks? 40

## XI

"What and if he, frowning, wake you, dreamy?

Lay on you the blame that bricks—conceal?

Say '*At least I saw who did not see me,*

*Does see now, and presently shall feel?*'"

## XII

"Why, that makes your friend a monster!" say you: 45

"Had his house no window? At first nod,

Would you not have hailed him?" Hush, I pray you!

What if this friend happened to be—God?

## HERVÉ RIEL\*

## I

ON the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,

Did the English fight the French,—woe to France!

And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,

Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,

Came crowding ship on ship to Saint-Malo on the Rance, 5

With the English fleet in view.

41-48. Browning explained to W. G. Kingsland that "it would be a wrong to the wisdom and goodness of the friend if he were supposed capable of overlooking the actual love and only considering the ignorance." ("Robert Browning . . . Reminiscences," in *Baylor's Browning Interests* Second Series, ed. A. J. Armstrong, 1931, p. 33.)

\* Printed in *Pacchiarotto* (1876), this poem had already been published, March, 1871, in the *Cornhill Magazine*, to which Browning sold the poem for a hundred guineas that he gave to the Paris Relief Fund. (Paris had just fallen to the Prussians at the end of the war of 1870.) The poem was dated "Croisic, Sept. 30, 1867." Browning had spent that summer, and the preceding, at the little Breton village of Croisic, and had probably read the story of the local hero in a guidebook.

1-2. Louis XIV had undertaken to restore James II to the English throne. His fleet was defeated off Cape La Hogue.

5. *Saint-Malo*: a Breton seaport at the mouth of the Rance river which flows into the English Channel.

## II

'T was the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;  
 First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, *Damfreville*;  
 Close on him fled, great and small,  
 Twenty-two good ships in all; 10  
 And they signalled to the place  
 "Help the winners of a race!  
 Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us quick—or, quicker  
 still,  
 Here 's the English can and will!"

## III

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;  
 "Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?"  
 laughed they: 16  
 "Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and  
 scored,—  
 Shall the 'Formidable' here, with her twelve and eighty guns,  
 Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,  
 Trust to enter—where 't is ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,  
 And with flow at full beside? 21  
 Now, 't is slackest ebb of tide.  
 Reach the mooring? Rather say,  
 While rock stands or water runs,  
 Not a ship will leave the bay!" 25

## IV

Then was called a council straight.  
 Brief and bitter the debate:  
 "Here 's the English at our heels; would you have them take in  
 tow  
 All that 's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,  
 For a prize to Plymouth Sound? 30  
 Better run the ships aground!"  
 (Ended *Damfreville* his speech).  
 "Not a minute more to wait!  
 Let the Captains all and each  
 Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!  
 France must undergo her fate. 36

8. *Damfreville*: Commander of the largest ship.

30. *Plymouth Sound*: naval station on the south coast of England.

## V

Give the word!" But no such word  
Was ever spoke or heard;

For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these  
—A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate—first, second, third? 40  
No such man of mark, and meet  
With his betters to compete!

But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,  
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

## VI

And "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé  
Riel: 45

"Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or  
rogues?

Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell  
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell

"Twixt the offing here and Grève where the river disem-  
bogues?

Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying 's for? 50  
Morn and eve, night and day,

Have I piloted your bay,

Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.

Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty  
Hogues!

Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there's  
a way! 55

Only let me lead the line,

Have the biggest ship to steer,

Get this 'Formidable' clear,

Make the others follow mine,

And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well, 60

Right to Solidor past Grève,

And there lay them safe and sound;

And if one ship misbehave,—

—Keel so much as grate the ground,

43. *Pressed*: conscripted for war. Tourville was Admiral of the French fleet.

46. *Malouins*: men from St. Malo.

49. *Grève*: the dangerous sands off the coast of Brittany from St. Malo to Mont St. Michel.

53. *Solidor*: fortified town at the mouth of the Rance.



Why, I 've nothing but my life,—here 's my head!" cries Hervé Riel. 65

## VII

Not a minute more to wait.

"Steer us in, then, small and great!

Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.

Captains, give the sailor place!

He is Admiral, in brief. 70

Still the north-wind, by God's grace

See the noble fellow's face

As the big ship, with a bound,

Clears the entry like a hound,

Keeps the passage, as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound! 75

See, safe thro' shoal and rock,

How they follow in a flock,

Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,

Not a spar that comes to grief!

The peril, see, is past. 80

All are harboured to the last,

And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate,

Up the English come,—too late!

## VIII

So, the storm subsides to calm:

They see the green trees wave 85

On the heights o'erlooking Grève.

Hearts that bled are stanch'd with balm.

"Just our rapture to enhance,

Let the English rake the bay,

Gnash their teeth and glare askance 90

As they cannonade away!

'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"

How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!

Out burst all with one accord,

"This is Paradise for Hell! 95

Let France, let France's King

Thank the man that did the thing!"

What shout, and all one word,

"Hervé Riel!"

As he stepped in front once more,  
 Not a symptom of surprise  
 In the frank blue Breton eyes,  
 Just the same man as before. 100

## IX

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,  
 I must speak out at the end,  
 Though I find the speaking hard. 105  
 Praise is deeper than the lips:  
 You have saved the King his ships,  
 You must name your own reward.  
 'Faith, our sun was near eclipse! 110  
 Demand whate'er you will,  
 France remains your debtor still.  
 Ask to heart's content and have! or my name 's not Damfreville."

## X

Then a beam of fun outbroke  
 On the bearded mouth that spoke, 115  
 As the honest heart laughed through  
 Those frank eyes of Breton blue:  
 "Since I needs must say my say,  
 Since on board the duty 's done,  
 And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a  
 run?— 120  
 Since 't is ask and have, I may—  
 Since the others go ashore—  
 Come! A good whole holiday!  
 Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!"  
 That he asked and that he got,—nothing more. 125

## XI

Name and deed alike are lost:  
 Not a pillar nor a post  
 In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;

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125. This is an error on Browning's part. According to reports in the files of the French Admiralty, Riel asked for complete discharge from the Navy. Browning later realized that he had mistaken the meaning of *congé absolu*, and admitted that "an absolute discharge seems to approach in importance a substantial reward" (*Letters* ed. Hood, p. 207).

Not a head in white and black  
 On a single fishing-smack, 130  
 In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack  
 All that France saved from the fight whence England bore  
 the bell.  
 Go to Paris: rank on rank  
 Search the heroes flung pell-mell  
 On the Louvre, face and flank! 135  
 You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé Riel.  
 So, for better and for worse,  
 Hervé Riel, accept my versel  
 In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more  
 Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle  
 Aurore! 140

## A FORGIVENESS\*

I AM indeed the personage you know.  
 As for my wife,—what happened long ago,—  
 You have a right to question me, as I  
 Am bound to answer.

("Son, a fit reply!")

The monk half spoke, half ground through his clenched teeth, 5  
 At the confession-grate I knelt beneath.)

Thus then all happened, Father! Power and place  
 I had as still I have. I ran life's race,  
 With the whole world to see, as only strains

132. *Bore the bell*: won first place.

135. *Louvre*: art museum in Paris.

\* Published in *Pacchiarotto* (1876). A Spanish nobleman is in a confessional, telling of his jealousy, contempt, vindictiveness, hatred, and revenge (according to the fantastic pride that characterized the old Spanish nobility). He knows that the monk to whom he is confessing was the guilty man. As in "Clive," the dramatic narrative carries a weight of extremely complicated psychology. As long as he thought his wife guilty of unfaithfulness, the husband felt only contempt, and they continued to act the part of a loving couple before the world. But three years later she admitted that she had always loved him and had merely tried to awaken his jealousy because she thought statecraft was drawing his attention away from her. At this, his contempt changed to hatred, he murdered her with poison, and then, consequently, loved her again.

His strength some athlete whose prodigious gains 10  
 Of good appal him: happy to excess,—  
 Work freely done should balance happiness  
 Fully enjoyed; and, since beneath my roof  
 Housed she who made home heaven, in heaven's behoof  
 I went forth every day, and all day long 15  
 Worked for the world. Look, how the labourer's song  
 Cheers him! Thus sang my soul, at each sharp throe  
 Of labouring flesh and blood—"She loves me so!"

One day, perhaps such song so knit the nerve  
 That work grew play and vanished. "I deserve, 20  
 Haply my heaven an hour before the time!"  
 I laughed, as silverly the clockhouse-chime  
 Surprised me passing through the postern-gate  
 —Not the main entry where the menials wait  
 And wonder why the world's affairs allow 25  
 The master sudden leisure. That was how  
 I took the private garden-way for once.

Forth from the alcove, I saw start, ensconce  
 Himself behind the porphyry vase, a man.

My fancies in the natural order ran: 30  
 "A spy,—perhaps a foe in ambushade,—  
 A thief,—more like, a sweetheart of some maid  
 Who pitched on the alcove for tryst perhaps."

"Stand there!" I bid.

Whereat my man but wraps  
 His face the closelier with uplifted arm 35  
 Whereon the cloak lies, strikes in blind alarm  
 This and that pedestal as,—stretch and stoop,—  
 Now in, now out of sight, he thrids the group  
 Of statues, marble god and goddess ranged  
 Each side the pathway, till the gate's exchanged 40  
 For safety: one step thence, the street, you know!

Thus far I followed with my gaze. Then, slow,  
 Near on admiringly, I breathed again,

And—back to that last fancy of the train—  
 “A danger risked for hope of just a word 45  
 With—which of all my nest may be the bird  
 This poacher covets for her plumage, pray?  
 Carmen? Juana? Carmen seems too gay  
 For such adventure, while Juana’s grave  
 —Would scorn the folly. I applaud the knave! 50  
 He had the eye, could single from my brood  
 His proper fledgeling!”

As I turned, there stood  
 In face of me, my wife stone-still stone-white.  
 Whether one bound had brought her,—at first sight  
 Of what she judged the encounter, sure to be 55  
 Next moment, of the venturous man and me,—  
 Brought her to clutch and keep me from my prey:  
 Whether impelled because her death no day  
 Could come so absolutely opportune  
 As now at joy’s height, like a year in June 60  
 Stayed at the fall of its first ripened rose:  
 Or whether hungry for my hate—who knows?—  
 Eager to end an irksome lie, and taste  
 Our tingling true relation, hate embraced  
 By hate one naked moment:—anyhow 65  
 There stone-still stone-white stood my wife, but now  
 The woman who made heaven within my house.  
 Ay, she who faced me was my very spouse  
 As well as love—you are to recollect!

“Stay!” she said. “Keep at least one soul unspecked 70  
 With crime, that’s spotless hitherto—your own!  
 Kill me who court the blessing, who alone  
 Was, am, and shall be guilty, first to last!  
 The man lay helpless in the toils I cast  
 About him, helpless as the statue there 75  
 Against that strangling bell-flower’s bondage: tear  
 Away and tread to dust the parasite,  
 But do the passive marble no despite!  
 I love him as I hate you. Kill me! Strike  
 At one blow both infinitudes alike 80  
 Out of existence—hate and love! Whence love?”

That 's safe inside my heart, nor will remove  
 For any searching of your steel, I think.  
 Whence hate? The secret lay on lip, at brink  
 Of speech, in one fierce tremble to escape,  
 At every form wherein your love took shape,  
 At each new provocation of your kiss.  
 Kill me!"

85

We went in.

Next day after this,  
 I felt as if the speech might come. I spoke—  
 Easily, after all.

"The lifted cloak  
 Was screen sufficient: I concern myself  
 Hardly with laying hands on who for pelf—  
 Whate'er the ignoble kind—may prowl and brave  
 Cuffing and kicking proper to a knave  
 Detected by my household's vigilance.  
 Enough of such! As for my love-romance—  
 I, like our good Hidalgo, rub my eyes  
 And wake and wonder how the film could rise  
 Which changed for me a barber's basin straight  
 Into—Mambrino's helm? I hesitate  
 Nowise to say—God's sacramental cup!  
 Why should I blame the brass which, burnished up,  
 Will blaze, to all but me, as good as gold?  
 To me—a warning I was overbold  
 In judging metals. The Hidalgo waked  
 Only to die, if I remember,—staked  
 His life upon the basin's worth, and lost:  
 While I confess torpidity at most  
 In here and there a limb; but, lame and halt,  
 Still should I work on, still repair my fault  
 Ere I took rest in death,—no fear at all!  
 Now, work—no word before the curtain fall!"

90

95

100

105

110

97. *Hidalgo*: Don Quixote, hero of Cervantes' novel.

100. See *Don Quixote*, ch. XXI, where the deluded knight mistakes a barber's copper basin for the golden helmet of King Mambrino that he had read about in romance.

The "curtain"? That of death on life, I meant:  
 My "word," permissible in death's event,  
 Would be—truth, soul to soul; for, otherwise, 115  
 Day by day, three years long, there had to rise  
 And, night by night, to fall upon our stage—  
 Ours, doomed to public play by heritage—  
 Another curtain, when the world, perforce  
 Our critical assembly, in due course 120  
 Came and went, witnessing, gave praise or blame  
 To art-mimetic. It had spoiled the game  
 If, suffered to set foot behind our scene,  
 The world had witnessed how stage-king and queen,  
 Gallant and lady, but a minute since 125  
 Enarming each the other, would evince  
 No sign of recognition as they took  
 His way and her way to whatever nook  
 Waited them in the darkness either side  
 Of that bright stage where lately groom and bride 130  
 Had fired the audience to a frenzy-fit  
 Of sympathetic rapture—every whit  
 Earned as the curtain fell on her and me,  
 —Actors. Three whole years, nothing was to see  
 But calm and concord; where a speech was due 135  
 There came the speech: when smiles were wanted too  
 Smiles were as ready. In a place like mine,  
 Where foreign and domestic cares combine,  
 There 's audience every day and all day long;  
 But finally the last of the whole throng 140  
 Who linger lets one see his back. For her—  
 Why, liberty and liking: I aver,  
 Liking and liberty! For me—I breathed,  
 Let my face rest from every wrinkle wreathed  
 Smile-like about the mouth, unlearned my task 145  
 Of personation till next day bade mask,  
 And quietly betook me from that world  
 To the real world, not pageant: there unfurled  
 In work, its wings, my soul, the fretted power.  
 Three years I worked, each minute of each hour 150  
 Not claimed by acting:—work I may dispense  
 With talk about, since work in evidence,  
 Perhaps in history; who knows or cares?

After three years, this way, all unawares,  
 Our acting ended. She and I, at close 155  
 Of a loud night-feast, led, between two rows  
 Of bending male and female loyalty,  
 Our lord the king down staircase, while, held high  
 At arm's length did the twisted tapers' flare  
 Herald his passage from our palace, where 160  
 Such visiting left glory evermore.  
 Again the ascent in public, till at door  
 As we two stood by the saloon—now blank  
 And disencumbered of its guests—there sank  
 A whisper in my ear, so low and yet 165  
 So unmistakable!

"I half forget  
 The chamber you repair to, and I want  
 Occasion for one short word—if you grant  
 That grace—within a certain room you called  
 Our 'Study,' for you wrote there while I scrawled 170  
 Some paper full of faces for my sport.  
 That room I can remember. Just one short  
 Word with you there, for the remembrance' sake!"

"Follow me thither!" I replied.

We break  
 The gloom a little, as with guiding lamp 175  
 I lead the way, leave warmth and cheer, by damp  
 Blind disused serpentining ways afar  
 From where the habitable chambers are,—  
 Ascend, descend stairs tunnelled through the stone,—  
 Always in silence,—till I reached the lone 180  
 Chamber sepulchred for my very own  
 Out of the palace-quarry. When a boy,  
 Here was my fortress, stronghold from annoy,  
 Proof-positive of ownership; in youth  
 I garnered up my gleanings here—uncouth 185  
 But precious relics of vain hopes, vain fears;  
 Finally, this became in after years  
 My closet of entrenchment to withstand  
 Invasion of the foe on every hand—



The multifarious herd in bower and hall, 190  
 State-room,—rooms whatsoe'er the style, which call  
 On masters to be mindful that, before  
 Men, they must look like men and something more.  
 Here,—when our lord the king's bestowment ceased  
 To deck me on the day that, golden-fleeced, 195  
 I touched ambition's height,—'t was here, released  
 From glory (always symbolled by a chain!)  
 No sooner was I privileged to gain  
 My secret domicile than glad I flung  
 That last toy on the table—gazed where hung 200  
 On hook my father's gift, the arquebuss—  
 And asked myself "Shall I envisage thus  
 The new prize and the old prize, when I reach  
 Another year's experience?—own that each  
 Equalled advantage—sportsman's—statesman's tool? 205  
 That brought me down an eagle, this—a fool!"

Into which room on entry, I set down  
 The lamp, and turning saw whose rustled gown  
 Had told me my wife followed, pace for pace.  
 Each of us looked the other in the face. 210  
 She spoke. "Since I could die now . . ."

(To explain

Why that first struck me, know—not once again  
 Since the adventure at the porphyry's edge  
 Three years before, which sundered like a wedge  
 Her soul from mine,—though daily, smile to smile, 215  
 We stood before the public,—all the while  
 Not once had I distinguished, in that face  
 I paid observance to, the faintest trace  
 Of feature more than requisite for eyes  
 To do their duty by and recognize: 220  
 So did I force mine to obey my will  
 And pry no further. There exists such skill,—  
 Those know who need it. What physician shrinks  
 From needful contact with a corpse? He drinks  
 No plague so long as thirst for knowledge—not 225  
 An idler impulse—prompts inquiry. What,

201. *Arquebuss*: form of gun used as early as the fifteenth century.

And will you disbelieve in power to bid  
 Our spirit back to bounds, as though we chid  
 A child from scrutiny that 's just and right  
 In manhood? Sense, not soul, accomplished sight, 230  
 Reported daily she it was—not how  
 Nor why a change had come to check and brow.)

"Since I could die now of the truth concealed,  
 Yet dare not, must not die—so seems revealed  
 The Virgin's mind to me—for death means peace, 235  
 Wherein no lawful part have I, whose lease  
 Of life and punishment the truth avowed  
 May haply lengthen,—let me push the shroud  
 Away, that steals to muffle ere is just  
 My penance-fire in snow! I dare—I must 240  
 Live, by avowal of the truth—this truth—  
 I loved you! Thanks for the fresh serpent's tooth  
 That, by a prompt new pang more exquisite  
 Than all preceding torture, proves me right!  
 I loved you yet I lost you! May I go 245  
 Burn to ashes, now my shame you know?"

I think there never was such—how express?—  
 Horror coquetting with voluptuousness,  
 As in those arms of Eastern workmanship—  
 Yataghan, kandjar, things that rend and rip, 250  
 Gash rough, slash smooth, help hate so many ways,  
 Yet ever keep a beauty that betrays  
 Love still at work with the artificer  
 Throughout his quaint devising. Why prefer,  
 Except for love's sake, that a blade should writhe 255  
 And bicker like a flame?—now play the scythe  
 As if some broad neck tempted,—now contract  
 And needle off into a fineness lacked  
 For just that puncture which the heart demands?  
 Then, such adornment! Wherefore need our hands 260  
 Enclose not ivory alone, nor gold  
 Roughened for use, but jewels? Nay, behold!  
 Fancy my favourite—which I seem to grasp

242. *Serpent's tooth*: ingratitude.

250. *Yataghan, etc.*: daggers and swords "of Eastern workmanship."  
 Browning owned such a collection of Oriental weapons.

While I describe the luxury. No asp  
 Is diapered more delicate round throat 265  
 Than this below the handle! These denote  
 —These mazy lines meandering, to end  
 Only in flesh they open—what intend  
 They else but water-purlings—pale contrast  
 With the life-crimson where they blend at last? 270  
 And mark the handle's dim pellucid green,  
 Carved, the hard jadestone, as you pinch a bean,  
 Into a sort of parrot-bird! He pecks  
 A grape-bunch; his two eyes are ruby-specks  
 Pure from the mine: seen this way,—glassy blank, 275  
 But turn them,—lo the inmost fire, that shrank  
 From sparkling, sends a red dart right to aim!  
 Why did I choose such toys? Perhaps the game  
 Of peaceful men is warlike, just as men  
 War-wearied get amusement from that pen 280  
 And paper we grow sick of—statesfolk tired  
 Of merely (when such measures are required)  
 Dealing out doom to people by three words  
 A signature and seal: we play with swords  
 Suggestive of quick process. That is how 285  
 I came to like the toys described you now,  
 Store of which glittered on the walls and strewed  
 The table, even, while my wife pursued  
 Her purpose to its ending. "Now you know  
 This shame, my three years' torture, let me go, 290  
 Burn to the very ashes! You—I lost,  
 Yet you—I loved!"

The thing I pity most  
 In men is—action prompted by surprise  
 Of anger: men? nay, bulls—whose onset lies  
 At instance of the firework and the goad! 295  
 Once the foe prostrate,—trampling once bestowed,—  
 Prompt follows placability, regret,  
 Atonement. Trust me, blood-warmth never yet  
 Betokened strong will! As no leap of pulse  
 Pricked me, that first time, so did none convulse 300  
 My veins at this occasion for resolve.

265. *Diapered*: covered with a diamond-shaped pattern

Had that devolved which did not then devolve  
Upon me, I had done—what now to do  
Was quietly apparent.

“Tell me who  
The man was, crouching by the porphyry vase!” 305

“No, never! All was folly in his case,  
All guilt in mine. I tempted, he complied.”

“And yet you loved me?”

“Loved you. Double-dyed  
In folly and in guilt, I thought you gave  
Your heart and soul away from me to slave 310  
At statecraft. Since my right in you seemed lost,  
I stung myself to teach you, to your cost,  
What you rejected could be prized beyond  
Life, heaven, by the first fool I threw a fond  
Look on, a fatal word to.”

“And you still  
Love me? Do I conjecture well or ill?” 315

“Conjecture—well or ill! I had three years  
To spend in learning you.”

“We both are peers  
In knowledge, therefore: since three years are spent  
Ere thus much of yourself I learn—who went 320  
Back to the house, that day, and brought my mind  
To bear upon your action, uncombined  
Motive from motive, till the dross, deprived  
Of every purer particle, survived  
At last in native simple hideousness, 325  
Utter contemptibility, nor less  
Nor more. Contemptibility—exempt  
How could I, from its proper due—contempt?  
I have too much despised you to divert  
My life from its set course by help or hurt 330

Of your all-despicable life—perturb  
 The calm, I work in, by—men's mouths to curb,  
 Which at such news were clamorous enough—  
 Men's eyes to shut before my broidered stuff  
 With the huge hole there, my emblazoned wall 335  
 Blank where a scutcheon hung,—by, worse than all,  
 Each day's procession, my paraded life  
 Robbed and impoverished through the wanting wife  
 —Now that my life (which means—my work) was grown  
 Riches indeed! Once, just this worth alone 340  
 Seemed work to have, that profit gained thereby  
 Of good and praise would—how rewardingly!—  
 Fall at your feet,—a crown I hoped to cast  
 Before your love, my love should crown at last.  
 No love remaining to cast crown before, 345  
 My love stopped work now: but contempt the more  
 Impelled me task as ever head and hand,  
 Because the very fiends weave ropes of sand  
 Rather than taste pure hell in idleness.  
 Therefore I kept my memory down by stress 350  
 Of daily work I had no mind to stay  
 For the world's wonder at the wife away.  
 Oh, it was easy all of it, believe,  
 For I despised you! But your words retrieve  
 Importantly the past. No hate assumed 355  
 The mask of love at any time! There gloomed  
 A moment when love took hate's semblance, urged  
 By causes you declare; but love's self purged  
 Away a fancied wrong I did both loves  
 —Yours and my own: by no hate's help, it proves, 360  
 Purgation was attempted. Then, you rise  
 High by how many a grade! I did despise—  
 I do but hate you. Let hate's punishment  
 Replace contempt's! First step to which ascent—  
 Write down your own words I re-utter you! 365  
*'I loved my husband and I hated—who*  
*He was, I took up as my first chance, mere*  
*Mud-ball to fling and make love foul with!' Here*  
*Lies paper!"*

“Would my blood for ink suffice!”

"It may: this minion from a land of spice,  
Silk, feather—every bird of jewelled breast—  
This poignard's beauty, ne'er so lightly prest  
Above your heart there . . ."

"Thus?"

"It flows, I see.

Dip there the point and write!"

"Dictate to me!

Nay, I remember."

And she wrote the words. 375  
I read them. Then—"Since love, in you, affords  
License for hate, in me, to quench (I say)  
Contempt—why, hate itself has passed away  
In vengeance—foreign to contempt. Depart  
Peacefully to that death which Eastern art 380  
Imbued this weapon with, if tales be true!  
Love will succeed to hate. I pardon you—  
Dead in our chamber!"

True as truth the tale.  
She died ere morning; then, I saw how pale  
Her cheek was ere it wore day's paint-disguise, 385  
And what a hollow darkened 'neath her eyes,  
Now that I used my own. She sleeps, as erst  
Beloved, in this your church: ay, yours!

Immersed  
In thought so deeply, Father? Sad, perhaps?  
For whose sake, hers or mine or his who wraps 390  
—Still plain I seem to see!—about his head  
The idle cloak,—about his heart (instead  
Of cuirass) some fond hope he may elude  
My vengeance in the cloister's solitude?  
Hardly, I think! As little helped his brow 395  
The cloak then, Father—as your grate helps now!

# PROLOGUE TO THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC\*

## I

SUCH a starved bank of moss  
Till, that May-morn,  
Blue ran the flash across:  
Violets were born!

## II

Sky—what a scowl of cloud  
Till, near and far,  
Ray on ray split the shroud  
Splendid, a star!

5

## III

World—how it walled about  
Life with disgrace  
Till God's own smile came out:  
That was thy face!

10

# PHEIDIPPIDES\*\*

Χαίρετε, νικῶμεν

FIRST I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock!  
Gods of my birthplace, dæmons and heroes, honour to all!  
Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise  
—Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and spear!

\* *The Two Poets of Croisic* was published with *La Saisiaz* in 1878. The Prologue has no special connection with the poem it precedes. If it is addressed to any one person this would be Browning's wife, who died in 1861. But before he met her there was no time in his poetic career when he seemed to feel that the World walled life about with disgrace.

11. It is characteristic of Browning to identify divine and human grace.

\*\*The Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) has often been considered the most decisive battle ever fought. Persia, gigantic and despotic Oriental empire, had invaded Greece, the first land to develop European civilization, where the seeds of free political life, of science, of philosophy, of art and literature as such, were just beginning to sprout. Defeat for Greece would probably have killed at the beginning almost everything we now value in our culture, and the West would have been forced to develop on the same lines as the Orient. Before the poem opens, Athens, the city that was to become the fountainhead of Western Civilization, had sent Pheidippides to ask aid of

Also, ye of the bow and the buskin, praised be your peer, 5  
 Now, henceforth and forever,—O latest to whom I upraise  
 Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and  
 flock!

Present to help, potent to save, Pan—patron I call!

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix, see, I return!  
 See, 't is myself here standing alive, no spectre that speaks! 10  
 Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens and  
 you,

“Run Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta for aid!  
 Persia has come, we are here, where is She?” Your command  
 I obeyed,

Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs  
 through,

Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights did  
 I burn 15

Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for “Persia has  
 come!

Sparta against the foreign foe. He is telling what happened. The long line is designed to give an effect similar to that of the hexameter, the meter of the Greek idyl. Browning constructed his story by combining Herodotus' account of Pheidippides' run to Sparta and meeting with Pan, Plutarch's account of the bringing of the news from the Battle of Marathon (*not* by Pheidippides, according to Plutarch), and Lucian's identification of this runner with Pheidippides, and his statement that his dying words were, “Rejoice, we conquer” (quoted in Greek at the head of this poem). See Cunliffe, “Browning and the Marathon Race,” in *P.M.L.A.*, XXIV (1909) 154–63, and DeVane, *Browning Handbook*, pp. 386–9. The poem was published in the first series of *Dramatic Idyls* (1879).

2. *Daemons*: guardian spirits.

4. *Her of the aegis and spear*: Athena (*aegis*: shield).

5. *Ye of the bow and the buskin*: Artemis, virgin goddess of the moon and of hunting. The buskin is a high-laced shoe.

8. *Pan*: god of nature, in form half goat, half man. He is said to have caused the defeat of the Persians at Marathon by inducing a *panic* in their ranks.

9. *Archons*: rulers; *tettix*: grasshopper (a golden image of which was worn by the Athenians to signify that they, like grasshoppers, sprang from Greek soil).

15. Browning has given more time than the ancient writers, who allowed Pheidippides only one day to cover the 130 miles from Athens to Sparta.



Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and earth;  
 Razed to the ground is Eretria—but Athens, shall Athens sink,  
 Drop into dust and die—the flower of Hellas utterly die, 20  
 Die, with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the  
 stander-by?

Answer me quick, what help, what hand do you stretch o'er  
 destruction's brink?

How,—when? No care for my limbs!—there 's lightning in  
 all and some—

Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!"

O my Athens—Sparta love thee? Did Sparta respond? 25  
 Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,  
 Malice,—each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified hate!  
 Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses. I  
 stood

Quivering,—the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch  
 from dry wood:

"Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate? 30  
 Thunder, thou Zeus! Athene, are Spartans a quarry beyond  
 Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis, clang them 'Ye  
 must'!"

No bolt launched from Olumpos! Lo, their answer at last!  
 "Has Persia come,—does Athens ask aid,—may Sparta befriend?  
 Nowise precipitate judgment—too weighty the issue at stake! 35  
 Count we no time lost time which lags through respect to the  
 Gods!

Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, whatever the odds  
 In your favour, so long as the moon, half-orbed, is unable to  
 take

Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she rounds to it fast:  
 Athens must wait, patient as we—who judgment suspend."

Athens,—except for that sparkle,—thy name, I had mouldered  
 to ash!

19. *Eretria*: important city on the island Euboea in the Aegean Sea.

20. *Hellas*: all Greek lands.

32. *Phoibos*: Phoebus Apollo. Browning transliterates the Greek names.

33. *Olumpos*: Olympus, a mountain in Greece, home of the gods,

That sent a blaze through my blood; off, off and away was I  
back,

—Not one word to waste, one look to lose on the false and  
the vile!

Yet "O Gods of my land!" I cried, as each hillock and plain,  
Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing past them  
again, 45

"Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honours we paid you  
erewhile?

Vain was the filleted victim, the fulsome libation! Too rash  
Love in its choice, paid you so largely service so slack!

"Oak and olive and bay,—I bid you cease to enwreathe  
Brows made bold by your leaf! Fade at the Persian's foot, 50  
You that, our patrons were pledged, should never adorn a slave!  
Rather I hail thee, Parnes,—trust to thy wild waste tract!  
Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain! What matter if slacked  
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave 54  
No deity deigns to drape with verdure? at least I can breathe,  
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute!"

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge;  
Gully and gap I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar  
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way. 59  
Right! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure across:  
"Where I could enter, there I depart by! Night in the fosse?  
Athens to aid? Though the dive were through Erebos, thus  
I obey—

Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise! No bridge  
Better!"—when—ha! what was it I came on, of wonders that  
are?

47. *Filleted victim*: animal adorned for sacrifice.

52. *Parnes*: a mountain *north* of Athens. This is 10 miles out of his way for the runner. Herodotus says he met Pan on Mt. Parthenium in Arcadia. Browning has perhaps deliberately changed the scene to a mountain in Attica, but compare a similar mistake in laying out the route for "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix."

61. *Fosse*: ditch.

62. *Erebos*: the dark region under the earth, which the dead pass through on their way to Hades. Line 62 was not in the edition of 1888–89 but was inserted after Browning's death according to his instructions.

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he—majestical Pan! 65  
 Ivy drooped wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his hoof:  
 All the great God was good in the eyes grave-kindly—the curl  
 Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe,  
 As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs grand I saw.  
 "Halt, Pheidippides!"—halt I did, my brain of a whirl: 70  
 "Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?" he gracious began:  
 "How is it,—Athens, only in Hellas, holds me aloof?

"Athens, she only, rears me no fane, makes me no feast!  
 Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more helpful of  
 old?

Ay, and still, and forever her friend! Test Pan, trust me! 75  
 Go, bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have faith  
 In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, "The Goat-God  
 saith:

When Persia—so much as strews not the soil—is cast in the  
 sea,

Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most and  
 least,

Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh, made one cause with the free and  
 the bold!" 80

"Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the  
 pledge!'"

(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear  
 —Fennel—I grasped it a-tremble with dew—whatever it bode)

"While, as for thee . . ." But enough! He was gone. If I  
 ran hitherto—

Be sure that, the rest of my journey, I ran no longer, but  
 flew. 85

Parnes to Athens—earth no more, the air was my road:  
 Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no more on the razor's  
 edge!

Pan for Athens, Pan for me! I too have a guerdon rare!

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Then spoke Miltiades. "And thee, best runner of Greece,  
 Whose limbs did duty indeed,—what gift is promised thy-  
 self?" 90

83. The fennel is prophetic, since "Marathon" means "fennel-field."

89. *Miltiades*: Greek general at the Battle of Marathon.

Tell it us straightway,—Athens the mother demands of her son!"

Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but, lifting at length  
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he gathered the rest of  
his strength

Into the utterance—"Pan spoke thus: 'For what thou hast done  
Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be allowed thee  
release

From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in praise or in pelf!" 95

"I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!  
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may  
grow,—

Pound—Pan helping us—Persia to dust, and, under the deep,  
Whelm her away for ever; and then,—no Athens to save,—  
Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave,—  
Hie to my house and home: and, when my children shall creep  
Close to my knees,—recount how the God was awful yet kind,  
Promised their sire reward to the full—rewarding him—so!" 98

Unforeseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day: 105  
So, when Persia was dust, all cried "To Akropolis!

Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!  
'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!" He flung down his  
shield,

Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field  
And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs  
through,

Till in he broke: "Rejoice, we conquer!" Like wine through  
clay,

Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!

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101. This is Browning's own romantic addition to the classical story.  
Cf. "Hervé Riel."

106. *Akropolis*: the citadel of Athens.

109. *Fennel-field*: in Greek, "Marathon."

111. "Rejoice, we conquer!" is a translation of the Greek phrase used  
as a motto at the head of the poem. Compare the "moral" of "Childe  
Roland" and of "Prospice."

112. Browning has the hero die of joy; Plutarch says he had been  
wounded. The difference is characteristic.

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute  
 Is still "Rejoice!"—his word which brought rejoicing indeed.  
 So is Pheidippides happy forever,—the noble strong man 115  
 Who could race like a God, bear the face of a God, whom a  
     God loved so well;  
 He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered  
     to tell  
 Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,  
 So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:  
 "Athens is saved!"—Pheidippides dies in the shout for his  
     meed. 120

## IVAN IVANOVITCH\*

"THEY tell me, your carpenters," quoth I to my friend the Russ,  
 "Make a simple hatchet serve as a tool-box serves with us.  
 Arin but each man with his axe, 't is a hammer and saw and  
     plane  
 And chisel, and—what know I else? We should imitate in  
     vain  
 The mastery wherewithal, by a flourish of just the adze, 5  
 He cleaves, clamps, dovetails in,—no need of our nails and  
     brads,—  
 The manageable pine: 't is said he could shave himself  
 With the axe,—so all adroit, now a giant and now an elf,  
 Does he work and play at once!"

Quoth my friend the Russ to me,  
 "Ay, that and more beside on occasion! It scarce may be 10  
 You never heard tell a tale told children, time out of mind,  
 By father and mother and nurse, for a moral that's behind,  
 Which children quickly seize. If the incident happened at all,

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\* Browning had travelled through Russia to St. Petersburg in the spring of 1834, and in this poem, which appeared in *Dramatic Idyls* forty-five years later, he has vividly reproduced the Russian atmosphere, concentrating into a few lines the impression that one ultimately gets from many pages of the great Russian novels. The poet's realism, his mastery of meter, his concern with moments of emotional intensity and morbid psychological states, even his love of melodrama, combine to produce a horror suitable to the story. It is especially horrible to let the woman tell the story herself. She betrays her willingness to let her children die to save her own life, a sin against maternal instinct so unnatural that the village priest justifies her summary execution.

We place it in Peter's time when hearts were great not small,  
 Germanized, Frenchified. I wager 't is old to you 15  
 As the story of Adam and Eve, and possibly quite as true."

In the deep of our land, 't is said, a village from out the woods  
 Emerged on the great main-road 'twixt two great solitudes.  
 Through forestry right and left, black verst and verst of pine,  
 From village to village runs the road's long wide bare line. 20  
 Clearance and clearance break the else-unconquered growth  
 Of pine and all that breeds and broods there, leaving loth  
 Man's inch of masterdom,—spot of life, spirt of fire,—  
 To star the dark and dread, lest right and rule expire  
 Throughout the monstrous wild, a-hungred to resume 25  
 Its ancient sway, suck back the world into its womb:  
 Defrauded by man's craft which clove from North to South  
 This highway broad and straight e'en from the Neva's mouth  
 To Moscow's gates of gold. So, spot of life and spirt  
 Of fire aforesaid, burn, each village death-begirt 30  
 By wall and wall of pine—unprobed undreamed abyss.

Early one winter morn, in such a village as this,  
 Snow-whitened everywhere except the middle road  
 Ice-roughed by track of sledge, there worked by his abode  
 Ivàn Ivànovitch, the carpenter, employed 35  
 On a huge shipmast trunk; his axe now trimmed and toyed  
 With branch and twig, and now some chop athwart the bole  
 Changed bole to billets, bared at once the sap and soul.  
 About him, watched the work his neighbours sheepskin-clad;  
 Each bearded mouth puffed steam, each grey eye twinkled  
 glad 40  
 To see the sturdy arm which, never stopping play,  
 Proved strong man's blood still boils, freeze winter as he may.  
 Sudden, a burst of bells. Out of the road, on edge

15-16. Peter the Great (1672-1725) began the Europeanization of Russia. In Browning's romantic opinion, the best guide to ethical wisdom was a great "heart."

19. *Verst*: two thirds of a mile.

28. *Neva*: river that empties into the Gulf of Finland at St. Petersburg (Leningrad).

29. *Moscow*: the ancient capital of Russia.

35. *Ivànovitch*: Ivàn is Russian for John; Ivànovitch similar to Johnson.

Of the hamlet—horse's hoofs galloping. "How, a sledge?  
 What 's here?" cried all as—in, up to the open space, 45  
 Workyard and market-ground, folk's common meeting-place,—  
 Stumbled on, till he fell, in one last bound for life,  
 A horse: and, at his heels, a sledge held—"Dmìtri's wife!  
 Back without Dmìtri too! and children—where are they?  
 Only a frozen corpse!"

They drew it forth: then—"Nay, 50  
 Not dead, though like to die! Gone hence a month ago:  
 Home again, this rough jaunt—alone through night and  
 snow—

What can the cause be? Hark—Droug, old horse, how he  
 groans:

His day 's done! Chafe away, keep chafing, for she moans:  
 She 's coming to! Give here: see, motherkin, your friends! 55  
 Cheer up, all safe at home! Warm inside makes amends  
 For outside cold,—sup quick! Don't look as we were bears!  
 What is it startles you? What strange adventure stares  
 Up at us in your face? You know friends—which is which?  
 I 'm Vàssili, he 's Sergeï, Ivàn Ivànovitch . . ." 60

At the word, the woman's eyes, slow-wandering till they neared  
 The blue eyes o'er the bush of honey-coloured beard,  
 Took in full light and sense and—torn to rags, some dream  
 Which hid the naked truth—O loud and long the scream  
 She gave, as if all power of voice within her throat 65  
 Poured itself wild away to waste in one dread note!  
 Then followed gasps and sobs, and then the steady flow  
 Of kindly tears: the brain was saved, a man might know.  
 Down fell her face upon the good friend's propping knee;  
 His broad hands smoothed her head, as fain to brush it free 70  
 From fancies, swarms that stung like bees unhived. He  
 soothed—

"Loukèria, Louschal!"—still he, fondling, smoothed and  
 smoothed.

At last her lips formed speech.

53. *Droug*: Russian for "Friend."

55. *Motherkin*: English equivalent for the Russian diminutive  
 "matushka."

"Ivàn, dear—you indeed!  
 You, just the same dear you! While I . . . O intercede,  
 Sweet Mother, with thy Son Almighty—let his might 75  
 Bring yesterday once more, undo all done last night!  
 But this time yesterday, Ivàn, I sat like you,  
 A child on either knee, and, dearer than the two,  
 A babe inside my arms, close to my heart—that 's lost  
 In morsels o'er the snow! Father, Son, Holy Ghost, 80  
 Cannot you bring again my blessed yesterday?"

When no more tears would flow, she told her tale: this way.

"Maybe, a month ago,—was it not?—news came here,  
 They wanted, deeper down, good workmen fit to rear  
 A church and roof it in. 'We 'll go,' my husband said: 85  
 'None understands like me to melt and mould their lead.'  
 So, friends here helped us off—Ivàn, dear, you the first!  
 How gay we jingled forth, all five—(my heart will burst)—  
 While Dmitri shook the reins, urged Droug upon his track!

"Well, soon the month ran out, we just were coming back, 90  
 When yesterday—behold, the village was on fire!  
 Fire ran from house to house. What help, as, nigh and nigher,  
 The flames came furious? 'Haste,' cried Dmitri, 'men must do  
 The little good man may: to sledge and in with you,  
 You and our three! We check the fire by laying flat 95  
 Each building in its path,—I needs must stay for that,—  
 But you . . . no time for talk! Wrap round you every rug,  
 Cover the couple close,—you 'll have the babe to hug.  
 No care to guide old Droug, he knows his way, by guess,  
 Once start him on the road: but chirrup, none the less! 100  
 The snow lies glib as glass and hard as steel, and soon  
 You 'll have rise, fine and full, a marvel of a moon.  
 Hold straight up, all the same, this lighted twist of pitch!  
 Once home and with our friend Ivàn Ivànovitch,  
 All 's safe: I have my pay in pouch, all 's right with me, 105  
 So I but find as safe you and our precious three!  
 Off, Droug!—because the flames had reached us, and the men  
 Shouted 'But lend a hand, Dmitri—as good as ten!'

"So, in we bundled—I, and those God gave me once;



Old Droug, that 's stiff at first, seemed youthful for the  
nonce: 110

He understood the case, galloping straight ahead.

Out came the moon: my twist soon dwindled, feebly red

In that unnatural day—yes, daylight, bred between

Moon-light and snow-light, lamped those grotto-depths which  
screen

Such devils from God's eye. Ah, pines, how straight you  
grow 115

Nor bend one pitying branch, true breed of brutal snow!

Some undergrowth had served to keep the devils blind

While we escaped outside their border!

“Was that—wind?

Anyhow, Droug starts, stops, back go his ears, he snuffs,  
Snorts,—never such a snort! then plunges, knows the  
sough 's 120

Only the wind: yet, no—our breath goes up too straight!

Still the low sound,—less low, loud, louder, at a rate

There 's no mistaking more! Shall I lean out—look—learn

The truth whatever it be? Pad, pad! At last, I turn—

“’T is the regular pad of the wolves in pursuit of the life in the  
sledge! 125

An army they are: close-packed they press like the thrust of a  
wedge:

They increase as they hunt: for I see, through the pine-trunks  
ranged each side,

Slip forth new fiend and fiend, make wider and still more wide

The four-footed steady advance. The foremost—none may  
pass:

They are elders and lead the line, eye and eye—green-glowing  
brass! 130

But a long way distant still. Droug, save us! He does his  
best:

Yet they gain on us, gain, till they reach,—one reaches . . . How  
utter the rest?

O that Satan-faced first of the band! How he lolls out the  
length of his tongue,

133. *Satan-faced*: refers to the Russian belief that wolves were reincarnations of witches of Satan.

How he laughs and lets gleam his white teeth! He is on me,  
 his paws pry among  
 The wraps and the rugs! O my pair, my twin pigeons, lie still  
 and seem dead! 135  
 Stepàn, he shall never have you for a meal,—here 's your mother  
 instead!  
 No, he will not be counselled—must cry, poor Stiòpka, so fool-  
 ish! though first  
 Of my boy-brood, he was not the best: nay, neighbours have  
 called him the worst:  
 He was puny, an undersized slip,—a darling to me, all the  
 same!  
 But little there was to be praised in the boy, and a plenty to  
 blame. 140  
 I loved him with heart and soul, yes—but, deal him a blow for  
 a fault,  
 He would sulk for whole days. 'Foolish boy! lie still or the  
 villain will vault,  
 Will snatch you from over my head!' No use! he cries, screams,  
 —who can hold  
 Fast a boy in a frenzy of fear! It follows—as I foretold!  
 The Satan-face snatched and snapped: I tugged, I tore—and  
 then 145  
 His brother too needs must shriek! If one must go, 't is men  
 The Tsar needs, so we hear, not ailing boys! Perhaps  
 My hands relaxed their grasp, got tangled in the wraps:  
 God, he was gone! I looked: there tumbled the cursed crew,  
 Each fighting for a share: too busy to pursue! 150  
 That 's so far gain at least: Droug, gallop another verst  
 Or two, or three—God sends we beat them, arrive the first!  
 A mother who boasts two boys was ever accounted rich:  
 Some have not a boy: some have, but lose him,—God knows  
 which  
 Is worse: how pitiful to see your weakling pine 155  
 And pale and pass away! Strong brats, this pair of mine!

"O misery! for while I settle to what near seems

135. *Twin-pigeons*: "little pigeon" (*golubchik*) is a common pet name in Russian.

137. *Stiòpka*: diminutive of Stepàn (Stephan).

Content, I am 'ware again of the tramp, and again there  
gleams—

Point and point—the line, eyes, levelled green brassy fire!  
So soon is resumed your chase? Will nothing appease, nought  
tire 160

The furies? And yet I think—I am certain the race is slack,  
And the numbers are nothing like. Not a quarter of the pack!  
Feasters and those full-fed are staying behind . . . Ah why?  
We 'll sorrow for that too soon! Now,—gallop, reach home,  
and die,

Nor ever again leave house, to trust our life in the trap 165  
For life—we call a sledge! Teriòscha, in my lap!  
Yes, I 'll lie down upon you, tight-tie you with the strings  
Here—of my heart! No fear, this time, your mother flings . . .  
Flings? I flung? Never! But think!—a woman, after all  
Contending with a wolf! Save you I must and shall, 170  
Terentiì!

“How now? What, you still head the race,  
Your eyes and tongue and teeth crave fresh food, Satan-face?  
There and there! Plain I struck green fire out! Flash again?  
All a poor fist can do to damage eyes proves vain!  
My fist—why not crunch that? He is wanton for . . . O  
God, 175  
Why give this wolf his taste? Common wolves scrape and  
prod

The earth till out they scratch some corpse—mere putrid flesh!  
Why must this glutton leave the faded, choose the fresh?  
Terentiì—God, feel!—his neck keeps fast thy bag  
Of holy things, saints' bones, this Satan-face will drag 180  
Forth, and devour along with him, our Pope declared  
The relics were to save from danger!

“Spurned, not spared!  
’T was through my arms, crossed arms, he—nuzzling now with  
snout,  
Now ripping, tooth and claw—plucked, pulled Terentiì out,  
A prize indeed! I saw—how could I else but see?— 185  
My precious one—I bit to hold back—pulled from me!  
Up came the others, fell to dancing—did the imps!—

166. *Teriòscha*: diminutive of Terentiì (Terence) cf. line 171.

181. *Pope*: village priest.

Skipped as they scampered round. There 's one is grey, and  
limps:

Who knows but old bad Mårpha,—she always owed me spite  
And envied me my births,—skulks out of doors at night 190  
And turns into a wolf, and joins the sisterhood,  
And laps the youthful life, then slinks from out the wood,  
Squats down at door by dawn, spins there demure as erst  
—No strength, old crone,—not she!—to crawl forth half a verst!

“Well, I escaped with one: 'twixt one and none there lies 195  
The space 'twixt heaven and hell. And see, a rose-light dyes  
The endmost snow: 't is dawn, 't is day, 't is safe at home!  
We have outwitted you! Ay, monsters, snarl and foam,  
Fight each the other fiend, disputing for a share,—  
Forgetful, in your greed, our finest off we bear, 200  
Tough Droug and I,—my babe, my boy that shall be man,  
My man that shall be more, do all a hunter can  
To trace and follow and find and catch and crucify  
Wolves, wolfkins, all your crew! A thousand deaths shall die  
The whimperingest cub that ever squeezed the teat! 205  
‘Take that!’ we 'll stab you with,—‘the tenderness we met  
When, wretches, you danced round—not this, thank God—not  
this!  
Hellhounds, we baulk you!’

“But—Ah, God above!—Bliss, bliss—  
Not the band, no! And yet—yes, for Droug knows him! One—  
This only of them all has said ‘She saves a son!’ 210  
His fellows disbelieve such luck: but he believes,  
He lets them pick the bones, laugh at him in their sleeves:  
He 's off and after us,—one speck, one spot, one ball  
Grows bigger, bound on bound,—one wolf as good as all!  
Oh but I know the trick! Have at the snaky tongue! 215  
That 's the right way with wolves! Go, tell your mates I wrung  
The panting morsel out, left you to howl your worst!  
Now for it—now! Ah me! I know him—thrice-accurst  
Satan-face,—him to the end my foe!

“All fight 's in vain:  
This time the green brass points pierce to my very brain. 220  
I fall—fall as I ought—quite on the babe I guard:

I overspread with flesh the whole of him. Too hard  
To die this way, torn piecemeal? Move hence? Not I—one  
inch!

Gnaw through me, through and through: flat thus I lie nor  
flinch!

O God, the feel of the fang furrowing my shoulder!—see! 225

It grinds—it grates the bone. O Kìrill under me,

Could I do more? Beside he knew wolf's way to win:

I clung, closed round like wax: yet in he wedged and in,

Past my neck, past my breasts, my heart, until . . . how feels

The onion-bulb your knife parts, pushing through its peels, 230

Till out you scoop its clove wherein lie stalk and leaf

And bloom and seed unborn?

“That slew me: yes, in brief,

I died then, dead I lay doubtlessly till Droug stopped

Here, I suppose. I come to life, I find me propped

Thus—how or when or why,—I know not. Tell me, friends,

All was a dream: laugh quick and say the nightmare ends! 236

Soon I shall find my house: 't is over there: in proof,

Save for that chimney heaped with snow, you 'd see the roof

Which holds my three—my two—my one—not one?

“Life's mixed

With misery, yet we live—must live. The Satan fixed 240

His face on mine so fast, I took its print as pitch

Takes what it cools beneath. Ivàn Ivànovitch,

'T is you unharden me, you thaw, disperse the thing!

Only keep looking kind, the horror will not cling.

Your face smooths fast away each print of Satan. Tears 245

—What good they do! Life's sweet, and all its after-years,

Ivàn Ivànovitch, I owe you! Yours am I!

May God reward you, dear!”

Down she sank. Solemnly

Ivàn rose, raised his axe,—for fitly, as she knelt,

Her head lay: well-apart, each side, her arms hung,—dealt 250

Lightning-swift thunder-strong one blow—no need of more!

Headless she knelt on still: that pine was sound at core

(Neighbours were used to say)—cast-iron-kernelled—which

Taxed for a second stroke Ivàn Ivànovitch.

The man was scant of words as strokes. "It had to be: 255  
 I could no other: God it was bade 'Act for me!'"  
 Then stooping, peering round—what is it now he lacks?  
 A proper strip of bark wherewith to wipe his axe.  
 Which done, he turns, goes in, closes the door behind.  
 The others mute remain, watching the blood-snake wind 260  
 Into a hiding-place among the splinter-heaps.  
 At length, still mute, all move: one lifts,—from where it steeps  
 Redder each ruddy rag of pine,—the head: two more  
 Take up the dripping body: then, mute still as before,  
 Move in a sort of march, march on till marching ends 265  
 Opposite to the church; where halting,—who suspends,  
 By its long hair, the thing, deposits in its place  
 The piteous head: once more the body shows no trace  
 Of harm done: there lies whole the Loùscha, maid and wife  
 And mother, loved until this latest of her life. 270  
 Then all sit on the bank of snow which bounds a space  
 Kept free before the porch for judgment: just the place!

Presently all the souls, man, woman, child, which make  
 The village up, are found assembling for the sake  
 Of what is to be done. The very Jews are there: 275  
 A Gipsy troop, though bound with horses for the Fair,  
 Squats with the rest. Each heart with its conception seethes  
 And simmers, but no tongue speaks: one may say,—none  
 breathes.

Anon from out the church totters the Pope—the priest—  
 Hardly alive, so old, a hundred years at least. 280  
 With him, the Commune's head, a hoary senior too,  
 Stàrosta, that 's his style,—like Equity Judge with you,—  
 Natural Jurisconsult: then, fenced about with furs,  
 Pomeschik—Lord of the Land, who wields—and none de-  
 murs—  
 A power of life and death. They stoop, survey the corpse. 285

Then, straightened on his staff, the Stàrosta—the thorpe's  
 Sagaciousest old man—hears what you just have heard,

282. *Stàrosta*: the old man, head of the village holding land in common.

284. *Pomeschik*: great landowner.

286. *Thorpe*: village.

From Droug's first inrush, all, up to Ivàn's last word  
 "God bade me act for him: I dared not disobey!"

Silence—the Pomeschik broke with "A wild wrong way 290  
 Of righting wrong—if wrong there were, such wrath to rouse!  
 Why was not law observed? What article allows  
 Whoso may please to play the judge, and, judgment dealt,  
 Play executioner, as promptly as we pelt  
 To death, without appeal, the vermin whose sole fault 295  
 Has been—it dared to leave the darkness of its vault,  
 Intrude upon our day! Too sudden and too rash!  
 What was this woman's crime? Suppose the church should  
 crash

Down where I stand, your lord: bound are my serfs to dare  
 Their utmost that I 'scape: yet, if the crashing scare 300  
 My children,—as you are,—if sons fly, one and all,  
 Leave father to his fate,—poor cowards though I call  
 The runaways, I pause before I claim their life  
 Because they prized it more than mine. I would each wife  
 Died for her husband's sake, each son to save his sire: 305  
 'T is glory, I applaud—scarce duty, I require.  
 Ivàn Ivànovitch has done a deed that 's named  
 Murder by law and me: who doubts, may speak unblamed!"

All turned to the old Pope. "Ay, children, I am old—  
 How old, myself have got to know no longer. Rolled 310  
 Quite round, my orb of life, from infancy to age,  
 Seems passing back again to youth. A certain stage  
 At least I reach, or dream I reach, where I discern  
 Truer truths, laws behold more lawlike than we learn  
 When first we set our foot to tread the course I trod 315  
 With man to guide my steps: who leads me now is God.  
 'Your young men shall see visions:' and in my youth I saw  
 And paid obedience to man's visionary law:  
 'Your old men shall dream dreams:' and, in my age, a hand  
 Conducts me through the cloud round law to where I stand  
 Firm on its base,—know cause, who, before, knew effect.

"The world lies under me: and nowhere I detect

So great a gift as this—God's own—of human life.  
 'Shall the dead praise thee?' No! 'The whole live world is  
     rife,  
 God, with thy glory,' rather! Life then, God's best of gifts, 325  
 For what shall man exchange? For life—when so he shifts  
 The weight and turns the scale, lets life for life restore  
 God's balance, sacrifice the less to gain the more,  
 Substitute—for low life, another's or his own—  
 Life large and liker God's who gave it: thus alone 330  
 May life extinguish life that life may trulier be!  
 How low this law descends on earth, is not for me  
 To trace: complexed becomes the simple, intricate  
 The plain, when I pursue law's winding. 'T is the straight  
 Outflow of law I know and name: to law, the fount 335  
 Fresh from God's footstool, friends, follow while I remount.

"A mother bears a child: perfection is complete  
 So far in such a birth. Enabled to repeat  
 The miracle of life,—herself was born so just  
 A type of womankind, that God sees fit to trust 340  
 Her with the holy task of giving life in turn.  
 Crowned by this crowning pride,—how say you, should she  
     spurn  
 Regality—discrowned, unchilded, by her choice  
 Of barrenness exchanged for fruit which made rejoice  
 Creation, though life's self were lost in giving birth 345  
 To life more fresh and fit to glorify God's earth?  
 How say you, should the hand God trusted with life's torch  
 Kindled to light the world—aware of sparks that scorch,  
 Let fall the same? Forsooth, her flesh a fire-flake stings  
 The mother drops the child! Among what monstrous things 350  
 Shall she be classed? Because of motherhood, each male  
 Yields to his partner place, sinks proudly in the scale:  
 His strength owned weakness, wit—folly, and courage—fear,  
 Beside the female proved male's mistress—only here.  
 The fox-dam, hunger-pined, will slay the felon sire 355  
 Who dares assault her whelp: the beaver, stretched on fire,  
 Will die without a groan: no pang avails to wrest  
 Her young from where they hide—her sanctuary breast.  
 What 's here then? Answer me, thou dead one, as, I trow,  
 Standing at God's own bar, he bids thee answer now! 360



Thrice crowned wast thou—each crown of pride, a child—thy charge!

Where are they? Lost? Enough: no need that thou enlarge

On how or why the loss: life left to utter 'lost'  
 Condemns itself beyond appeal. The soldier's post  
 Guards from the foe's attack the camp he sentinels: 365  
 That he no traitor proved, this and this only tells—  
 Over the corpse of him trod foe to foe's success.

Yet—one by one thy crowns torn from thee—thou no less  
 To scare the world, shame God,—livedst! I hold He saw  
 The unexampled sin, ordained the novel law, 370  
 Whereof first instrument was first intelligence

Found loyal here. I hold that, failing human sense,  
 The very earth had oped, sky fallen, to efface  
 Humanity's new wrong, motherhood's first disgrace.  
 Earth oped not, neither fell the sky, for prompt was found 375  
 A man and man enough, head-sober and heart-sound,  
 Ready to hear God's voice, resolute to obey.

Ivàn Ivànovitch, I hold, has done, this day,  
 No otherwise than did, in ages long ago,  
 Moses when he made known the purport of that flow 380  
 Of fire athwart the law's twain-tables! I proclaim  
 Ivàn Ivànovitch God's servant!"

At which name

Uprose that creepy whisper from out the crowd, is wont  
 To swell and surge and sing when fellow-men confront  
 A punishment that falls on fellow flesh and blood, 385  
 Appallingly beheld—shudderingly understood,  
 No less, to be the right, the just, the merciful.  
 "God's servant!" hissed the crowd.

When that Amen grew dull

And died away and left acquittal plain adjudged,  
 "Amen!" last sighed the lord. "There 's none shall say I  
 grudged 390

Escape from punishment in such a novel case.  
 Deferring to old age and holy life,—be grace  
 Granted! say I. No less, scruples might shake a sense  
 Firmer than I boast mine. Law 's law, and evidence

Of breach therein lies plain,—blood-red-bright,—all may see! 395  
Yet all absolve the deed: absolved the deed must be!

“And next—as mercy rules the hour—methinks ’t were well  
You signify forthwith its sentence, and dispel  
The doubts and fears, I judge, which busy now the head  
Law puts a halter round—a halo—you, instead! 400  
Ivàn Ivànovitch—what think you he expects  
Will follow from his feat? Go, tell him—law protects  
Murder, for once: no need he longer keep behind  
The Sacred Pictures—where skulks Innocence enshrined,  
Or I missay! Go, some! You others, haste and hide 405  
The dismal object there: get done, whate’er betide!”

So, while the youngers raised the corpse, the elders trooped  
Silently to the house: where halting, someone stooped,  
Listened beside the door; all there was silent too.  
Then they held counsel; then pushed door and, passing through,  
Stood in the murderer’s presence. 411

Ivàn Ivànovitch  
Knelt, building on the floor that Kremlin rare and rich  
He deftly cut and carved on lazy winter nights.  
Some five young faces watched, breathlessly, as, to rights,  
Piece upon piece, he reared the fabric nigh complete. 415  
Stèscha, Ivàn’s old mother, sat spinning by the heat  
Of the oven where his wife Kàtia stood baking bread.  
Ivàn’s self, as he turned his honey-coloured head,  
Was just in act to drop, ’twixt fir-cones,—each a dome,—  
The scooped-out yellow gourd presumably the home 420  
Of Kolokol the Big: the bell, therein to hitch,  
—An acorn-cup—was ready: Ivàn Ivànovitch  
Turned with it in his mouth.

They told him he was free  
As air to walk abroad. “How otherwise?” asked he.

404. *Sacred Pictures*: the sacred icons, mosaics, or paintings.

412. *Kremlin*: the fortress and palace at Moscow.

421. *Kolokol the Big*: the great bell in the Kremlin.

## ECHETLOS\*

HERE is a story shall stir you! Stand up, Greeks dead and gone,  
Who breasted, beat Barbarians, stemmed Persia rolling on,  
Did the deed and saved the world, for the day was Marathon!

No man but did his manliest, kept rank and fought away  
In his tribe and file: up, back, out, down—was the spear-arm  
play: 5  
Like a wind-whipt branchy wood, all spear-arms a-swing that  
day!

But one man kept no rank and his sole arm plied no spear,  
As a flashing came and went, and a form 'i' the van, the rear,  
Brightened the battle up, for he blazed now there, now here.

Nor helmed nor shielded, he! but, a goat-skin all his wear, 10  
Like a tiller of the soil, with a clown's limbs broad and bare,  
Went he ploughing on and on: he pushed with a ploughman's  
share.

Did the weak mid-line give way, as tunnies on whom the shark  
Precipitates his bulk? Did the right-wing halt when, stark  
On his heap of slain lay stretched Kallimachos Polemarch? 15

Did the steady phalanx falter? To the rescue, at the need,  
The clown was ploughing Persia, clearing Greek earth of weed,  
As he routed through the Sakian and rooted up the Mede.

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\*Published in the *Second Series of Dramatic Idyls* (1880). Like Pheidippides, Echelos is a modest hero of the Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.)—this time an unknown rustic who used a ploughshare as a sword. The oracles said to call the nameless hero "Ploughshare-wielder" (*Echelos*). But the fame of this humble man's great deed remains untarnished, while eminent men with famous names came to a grievous end. The story is from Pausanias and Herodotus.

3. Marathon: See the first note to "Pheidippides."

11. *Clown*: rustic.

13. *Tunnies*: fish of the mackerel family.

15. Kallimachos held the office of *polemarch* (archon in charge of military affairs) at Marathon.

18. The Sakae were Scythian tribes fighting for Persia; the Medes were associated with the Persians in ruling their empire.

But the deed done, battle won,—nowhere to be descried  
 On the meadow, by the stream, at the marsh,—look far and  
     wide 20  
 From the foot of the mountain, no, to the last blood-plashed  
     seaside,—

Not anywhere on view blazed the large limbs thonged and  
     brown,  
 Shearing and clearing still with the share before which—down  
 To the dust went Persia's pomp, as he ploughed for Greece, that  
     clown!

How spake the Oracle? "Care for no name at all! 25  
 Say but just this: 'We praise one helpful whom we call  
 The Holder of the Ploughshare.' The great deed ne'er grows  
     small."

Not the great name! Sing—woe for the great name Miltiades  
 And its end at Paros isle! Woe for Themistokles  
 —Satrap in Sardis court! Name not the clown like these! 30

## CLIVE\*

I AND Clive were friends—and why not? Friends! I think  
     you laugh, my lad.

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28–29. Miltiades, Athenian general at Marathon, was later thought to have made war on the island of Paros to satisfy a private grudge. He died miserably of a wound.

29–30. Themistokles was chief archon of Athens at this period. Accused of bribery, and ostracized, he fled to Persia and was made a provincial governor (Satrap) by the Persian king, Artaxerxes. Sardis was capital of Lydia, part of the Persian Empire.

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\* Published in *Dramatic Idyls, Second Series* (1880). Clive is popularly considered a brave hero, but the time that he seemed most courageous he says was the time he "felt most fear"—moral cowardice rather than physical courage. This is an old man's reminiscence of what Clive, a week before his suicide, had told him of an incident 25 years earlier. Like Browning's *Aristophanes' Apology* or some of Conrad's novels, one fictitious character tells what another character told, so that the narrative is doubly refracted through two minds. This, plus the fact of suicide, poses a very subtle and complicated problem: Was Clive a brave man or a coward? What does Browning think? What does the speaker think? What does Clive think at the conclusion? What did Clive think at the time? Yet in spite of the

Clive it was gave England India, while your father gives—egad,  
England nothing but the graceless boy who lures him on to  
speak—

“Well, Sir, you and Clive were comrades—” with a tongue  
thrust in your cheek!

Very true: in my eyes, your eyes, all the world’s eyes, Clive was  
man, 5

I was, am and ever shall be—mouse, nay, mouse of all its clan  
Sorriest sample, if you take the kitchen’s estimate for fame;  
While the man Clive—he fought Plassy, spoiled the clever  
foreign game,  
Conquered and annexed and Englished!

Never mind! As o’er my punch  
(You away) I sit of evenings,—silence, save for biscuit-crunch,  
Black, unbroken,—thought grows busy, thrids each pathway of  
old years, 11

Notes this forthright, that meander, till the long-past life appears  
Like an outspread map of country plodded through, each mile  
and rood,

Once, and well remembered still: I ’m startled in my solitude  
Ever and anon by—what ’s the sudden mocking light that  
breaks 15

On me as I slap the table till no rummer-glass but shakes  
While I ask—aloud, I do believe, God help me!—“Was it thus?  
Can it be that so I faltered, stopped when just one step for us—”  
(Us,—you were not born, I grant, but surely some day born  
would be)

“—One bold step had gained a province” (figurative talk, you  
see) 20

“Got no end of wealth and honour,—yet I stood stock still no  
less?”

psychological complications and moral subtleties, this Idyl is a dramatic narrative and creates a vivid impression of the young Clive in India and the broken Clive in London, and the eighteenth-century setting.

2. Robert Clive (1725–1774), the general and statesman who consolidated British power in India, began his career as a clerk in the East India Company, and this incident belongs to that period of his life.

8. *Plassy*: or Plassey, battle in India (1757), at which Clive defeated the French.

11. *Thrids*: threads.

16. *Rummer-glass*: large glass for drinking wine.

—"For I was not Clive," you comment: but it needs no Clive  
to guess

Wealth were handy, honour ticklish, did no writing on the wall  
Warn me "Trespasser, 'ware man-traps!" Him who braves that  
notice—call

Hero! none of such heroics suit myself who read plain words,  
Doff my hat, and leap no barrier. Scripture says the land 's  
the Lord's: 26

Louts then—what avail the thousand, noisy in a smock-frocked  
ring,

All-agog to have me trespass, clear the fence, be Clive their king?  
Higher warrant must you show me ere I set one foot before  
T'other in that dark direction, though I stand for evermore 30  
Poor as Job and meek as Moses. Evermore? No! By-and-by  
Job grows rich and Moses valiant, Clive turns out less wise  
than I.

Don't object "Why call him friend, then?" Power is power,  
my boy, and still

Marks a man,—God's gift magnific, exercised for good or ill.

You 've your boot now on my hearth-rug, tread what was a  
tiger's skin: 35

Rarely such a royal monster as I lodged the bullet in!

True, he murdered half a village, so his own death came to pass;  
Still, for size and beauty, cunning, courage—ah, the brute he  
was!

Why, that Clive,—that youth, that greenhorn, that quill-driving  
clerk, in fine,—

He sustained a siege in Arcot . . . But the world knows! Pass  
the wine. 40

Where did I break off at? How bring Clive in? Oh, you  
mentioned "fear"!

Just so: and, said I, that minds me of a story you shall hear.

We were friends then, Clive and I: so, when the clouds, about  
the orb

Late supreme, encroaching slowly, surely, threatened to absorb  
Ray by ray its noontide brilliance,—friendship might, with  
steadier eye 45

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40. *Arcot*: capital of the province of the Carnatic in India, which Clive  
held against the French in 1751.

Drawing near, bear what had burned else, now no blaze—all  
majesty.

Too much bee's-wing floats my figure? Well, suppose a castle's  
new:

None presume to climb its ramparts, none find foothold sure for  
shoe

"Twixt those squares and squares of granite plating the imper-  
vious pile

As his scale-mail's warty iron cuirasses a crocodile. 50

Reels that castle thunder-smitten, storm-dismantled? From  
without

Scrambling up by crack and crevice, every cockney prates about  
Towers—the heap he kicks now! turrets—just the measure of  
his canel

Will that do? Observe moreover—(same similitude again)—

Such a castle seldom crumbles by sheer stress of cannonade: 55

'T is when foes are foiled and fighting's finished that vile rains  
invade,

Grass o'ergrows, o'ergrows till night-birds congregating find  
no holes

Fit to build in like the topmost sockets made for banner-poles.

So Clive crumbled slow in London—crashed at last.

A week before,

Dining with him,—after trying churchyard-chat of days of  
yore,— 60

Both of us stopped, tired as tombstones, head-piece, foot-piece,  
when they lean

Each to other, drowsed in fog-smoke, o'er a confined Past be-  
tween.

As I saw his head sink heavy, guessed the soul's extinguishment

By the glazing eyeball, noticed how the furtive fingers went

Where a drug-box skulked behind the honest liquor,—“One  
more throw 65

Try for Clive!” thought I: “Let's venture some good rattling  
question!” So—

“Come, Clive, tell us”—out I blurted—“what to tell in turn,  
years hence,

47. *Bee's-wing*: a film on port wine showing its age.

65. Macaulay writes, “To obtain ease he called in the help of opium;  
and he was gradually enslaved by this dangerous ally.”

When my boy—suppose I have one—asks me on what evidence  
I maintain my friend of Plassy proved a warrior every whit  
Worth your Alexanders, Cæsars, Marlboroughs and—what said  
Pitt?—

70

Frederick the Fierce himself! Clive told me once—I want to  
say—

“Which feat out of all those famous doings bore the bell away  
—In his own calm estimation, mark you, not the mob’s rough  
guess—

Which stood foremost as evincing what Clive called courageous-  
ness!

Come! what moment of the minute, what speck-centre in the  
wide

75

Circle of the action saw your mortal fairly deified?

(Let alone that filthy sleep-stuff, swallow bold this wholesome  
Port!)

If a friend has leave to question,—when were you most brave,  
in short?”

Up he arched his brows o’ the instant—formidably Clive again.  
“When was I most brave? I’d answer, were the instance half  
as plain

80

As another instance that ’s a brain-lodged crystal—curse it!—  
here

Freezing when my memory touches—ugh!—the time I felt  
most fear.

Ugh! I cannot say for certain if I showed fear—anyhow,  
Fear I felt, and, very likely, shuddered, since I shiver now.”

“Fear!” smiled I. “Well, that ’s the rarer: that ’s a specimen  
to seek,

85

Ticket up in one’s museum, *Mind-Freaks, Lord Clive’s Fear,  
Unique!*”

Down his brows dropped. On the table painfully he pored as  
though

70. In a speech in the House of Commons, Pitt compared Clive to the  
greatest generals of history, saying that even Frederick (the Great) of  
Prussia might envy him.



Tracing, in the stains and streaks there, thoughts encrusted long ago.

When he spoke 't was like a lawyer reading word by word some will,

Some blind jungle of a statement,—beating on and on until 90  
Out there leaps fierce life to fight with.

“This fell in my factor-days.

Desk-drudge, slaving at St. David's, one must game, or drink, or craze.

I chose gaming: and,—because your high-flown gamblers hardly take

Umbrage at a factor's elbow if the factor pays his stake,—

I was winked at in a circle where the company was choice, 95

Captain This and Major That, men high of colour, loud of voice,

Yet indulgent, condescending to the modest juvenile

Who not merely risked but lost his hard-earned guineas with a smile.

“Down I sat to cards, one evening,—had for my antagonist

Somebody whose name 's a secret—you 'll know why—so, if you list, 100

Call him Cock o' the Walk, my scarlet son of Mars from head to heel!

Play commenced: and, whether Cocky fancied that a clerk must feel

Quite sufficient honour came of bending over one green baize,

I the scribe with him the warrior,—guessed no penman dared to raise

Shadow of objection should the honour stay but playing end

More or less abruptly,—whether disinclined he grew to spend

Practice strictly scientific on a booby born to stare 107

At—not ask of—lace-and-ruffles if the hand they hide plays fair,—

Anyhow, I marked a movement when he bade me ‘Cut!’

91. *Factor*: clerk or “writer” in the East India Company. He was then stationed at Fort St. David's. Being a civilian, he would be looked upon with scorn by the military men, since military careers were a special privilege of the aristocracy.

"I rose.

'Such the new manœuvre, Captain? I'm a novice: knowledge  
grows. 110

What, you force a card, you cheat, Sir?'

"Never did a thunder-clap  
Cause emotion, startle Thyrsis locked with Chloe in his lap,  
As my word and gesture (down I flung my cards to join the  
pack)  
Fired the man of arms, whose visage, simply red before, turned  
black.

When he found his voice, he stammered "That expression once  
again! 115

"Well, you forced a card and cheated!"

"Possibly a factor's brain,  
Busied with his all-important balance of accounts, may deem  
Weighing words superfluous trouble: *cheat* to clerkly ears may  
seem

Just the joke for friends to venture: but we are not friends, you  
see!

When a gentleman is joked with,—if he's good at repartee, 120  
He repoins, as do I—Sirrah, on your knees, withdraw in full!  
Beg my pardon, or be sure a kindly bullet through your skull  
Lets in light and teaches manners to what brain it finds! Choose  
quick—

Have your life snuffed out or, kneeling, pray me trim yon  
candle-wick!

"Well, you cheated!"

"Then outbroke a howl from all the friends around. 125  
To his feet sprang each in fury, fists were clenched and teeth  
were ground.

'End it! no time like the present! Captain, yours were our  
disgrace!

No delay, begin and finish! Stand back, leave the pair a space!  
Let civilians be instructed: henceforth simply ply the pen,

112. *Thyrsis, Chloe*: pastoral lovers.

Fly the sword! This clerk 's no swordsman? Suit him with a  
pistol, then! 130

Even odds! A dozen paces 'twixt the most and least expert  
Make a dwarf a giant's equal: nay, the dwarf, if he 's alert,  
Likelier hits the broader target!

“Up we stood accordingly.

As they handed me the weapon, such was my soul's thirst to try  
Then and there conclusions with this bully, tread on and stamp  
out 135

Every spark of his existence, that,—crept close to, curled about  
By that toying tempting teasing fool-forefinger's middle joint,—  
Don't you guess?—the trigger yielded. Gone my chance! and  
at the point

Of such prime success moreover: scarce an inch above his head  
Went my ball to hit the wainscot. He was living, I was dead.

“Up he marched in flaming triumph—'t was his right, mind!—  
up, within

Just an arm's length. ‘Now, my clerkling,’ chuckled Cocky  
with a grin

As the levelled piece quite touched me, ‘Now, Sir Counting-  
House, repeat

That expression which I told you proved bad manners! Did I  
cheat?’

“‘Cheat you did, you knew you cheated, and, this moment,  
know as well. 145

As for me, my homely breeding bids you—fire and go to Hell!’

“Twice the muzzle touched my forehead. Heavy barrel, flurried  
wrist,

Either spoils a steady lifting. ‘Thrice: then, ‘Laugh at Hell who  
list,

I can't! God 's no fable either. Did this boy's eye wink once?  
No!

There 's no standing him and Hell and God all three against  
me,—so, 150

I did cheat!’

“And down he threw the pistol, out rushed—by the door  
Possibly, but, as for knowledge if by chimney, roof or floor,

He effected disappearance—I 'll engage no glance was sent  
 That way by a single starrer, such a blank astonishment  
 Swallowed up their senses: as for speaking—mute they stood  
 as mice 155

“Mute not long, though! Such reaction, such a hubbub in a  
 trice!

‘Rogue and rascal! Who 'd have thought it? What 's to be  
 expected next,

When His Majesty's Commission serves a sharper as pretext  
 For . . . But where 's the need of wasting time now? Nought  
 requires delay: 159

Punishment the Service cries for: let disgrace be wiped away  
 Publicly, in good broad daylight! Resignation? No, indeed  
 Drum and fife must play the Rogue's March, rank and file be  
 free to speed

Tardy marching on the rogue's part by appliance in the rear  
 —Kicks administered shall right this wronged civilian,—never  
 fear,

Mister Clive, for—though a clerk—you bore yourself—suppose  
 we say— 165

Just as would beseem a soldier!

“‘Gentlemen, attention—pray!

First, one word!

“I passed each speaker severally in review.  
 When I had precise their number, names and styles, and fully  
 knew

Over whom my supervision thenceforth must extend,—why,  
 then——

“‘Some five minutes since, my life lay—as you all saw, gentle-  
 men— 170

At the mercy of your friend there. Not a single voice was raised  
 In arrest of judgment, not one tongue—before my powder  
 blazed—

Ventured “Can it be the youngster blundered, really seemed to  
 mark

---

162. *Rogue's March*: a march played upon dishonorable discharge from  
 the British army.

Some irregular proceeding? We conjecture in the dark,  
 Guess at random,—still, for sake of fair play—what if for a  
 freak, 175

In a fit of absence,—such things have been!—if our friend  
 proved weak

—What 's the phrase?—corrected fortune! Look into the case,  
 at least!"

Who dared interpose between the altar's victim and the priest?

Yet he spared me! You eleven! Whosoever, all or each,

To the disadvantage of the man who spared me, utters speech 180

—To his face, behind his back,—that speaker has to do with me:  
 Me who promise, if positions change and mine the chance  
 should be,

Not to imitate your friend and waive advantage!"

"Twenty-five

Years ago this matter happened: and 't is certain," added Clive,  
 "Never, to my knowledge, did Sir Cocky have a single breath  
 Breathed against him: lips were closed throughout his life, or  
 since his death, 186

For if he be dead or living I can tell no more than you.

All I know is—Cocky had one chance more; how he used it,—  
 grew

Out of such unlucky habits, or relapsed, and back again

Brought the late-ejected devil with a score more in his train,—

That 's for you to judge. Reprieval I procured, at any rate.

Ugh—the memory of that minute's fear makes gooseflesh rise!

Why prate 192

Longer? You 've my story, there 's your instance: fear I did,  
 you see!"

"Well"—I hardly kept from laughing—"if I see it, thanks must  
 be

Wholly to your Lordship's candour. Not that—in a common  
 case— 195

When a bully caught at cheating thrusts a pistol in one's face,  
 I should underrate, believe me, such a trial to the nerve!

---

183-4. He would be 46, since line 198 says he was 21 when the incident occurred. But Clive was actually 49 years old at his death (which line 238 tells us was next week).

'T is no joke, at one-and-twenty, for a youth to stand nor swerve.  
 Fear I naturally look for—unless, of all men alive,  
 I am forced to make exception when I come to Robert Clive.  
 Since at Arcot, Plassy, elsewhere, he and death—the whole world  
 knows— 201  
 Came to somewhat closer quarters."

Quarters? Had we come to blows,  
 Clive and I, you had not wondered—up he sprang so, out he  
 rapped  
 Such a round of oaths—no matter! I 'll endeavour to adapt  
 To our modern usage words he—well, 't was friendly licence  
 —flung 205  
 At me like so many fire-balls, fast as he could wag his tongue.

"You—a soldier? You—at Plassy? Yours the faculty to nick  
 Instantaneously occasion when your foe, if lightning-quick,  
 —At his mercy, at his malice,—has you, through some stupid  
 inch

Undefended in your bulwark? Thus laid open,—not to flinch  
 —That needs courage, you 'll concede me. Then, look here!

Suppose the man, 211

Checking his advance, his weapon still extended, not a span  
 Distant from my temple,—curse him!—quietly had bade me  
 'There!

Keep your life calumniator!—worthless life I freely spare:  
 Mine you freely would have taken—murdered me and my good  
 fame 215

Both at once—and all the better! Go, and thank your own bad  
 aim

Which permits me to forgive you! What if, with such words  
 as these,

He had cast away his weapon? How should I have borne me,  
 please?

---

211. Browning said this supposition was his own invention: What if the antagonist, instead of confessing, had reiterated his innocence and offered to spare his worthless life? Such a man as Clive, Browning felt, would have had to kill himself. But it is fictitious to make Clive consider such a possibility. The psychological point is that courage can be close to cowardice, mere luck making the difference. Contrast the Aristotelian conception of virtue as a habit, induced by long practice.

Nay, I 'll spare you pains and tell you. This, and only this,  
remained—

Pick his weapon up and use it on myself. I so had gained 220  
Sleep the earlier, leaving England probably to pay on still  
Rent and taxes for half India, tenant at the Frenchman's will."

"Such the turn," said I, "the matter takes with you? Then I  
abate

—No, by not one jot nor tittle,—of your act my estimate.

Fear—I wish I could detect there: courage fronts me, plain  
enough— 225

Call it desperation, madness—never mind! for here 's in rough  
Why, had mine been such a trial, fear had overcome disgrace.  
True, disgrace were hard to bear: but such a rush against God's  
face

—None of that for me, Lord Plassy, since I go to church at times,  
Say the creed my mother taught me! Many years in foreign  
climes 230

Rub some marks away—not all, though! We poor sinners reach  
life's brink,

Overlook what rolls beneath it, recklessly enough, but think  
There 's advantage in what 's left us—ground to stand on, time  
to call

'Lord, have mercy!' ere we topple over—do not leap, that 's all!"

Oh, he made no answer,—re-absorbed into his cloud. I caught  
Something like "Yes—courage: only fools will call it fear." 236  
If aught

Comfort you, my great unhappy hero Clive, in that I heard,  
Next week, how your own hand dealt you doom, and uttered  
just the word

"Fearfully courageous!"—this, be sure, and nothing else I  
groaned.

I 'm no Clive, nor parson either: Clive's worst deed—we 'll hope  
condoned. 240

220–21. Clive is already wishing for death.

229. *Lord Plassy*: Clive's title as a baron.

238. Clive, a broken man and a drug addict, committed suicide in 1774.  
Hence there is an element of cowardice in Clive in spite of his agreement  
with the speaker in line 236.

## MULÉYKEH\*

IF a stranger passed the tent of Hóseyn, he cried "A churl's!"  
 Or haply "God help the man who has neither salt nor bread!"  
 —"Nay," would a friend exclaim, "he needs nor pity nor scorn  
 More than who spends small thought on the shore-sand, picking  
 pearls,  
 —Holds but in light esteem the seed-sort, bears instead 5  
 On his breast a moon-like prize, some orb which of night makes  
 morn.

"What if no flocks and herds enrich the son of Sinán?  
 They went when his tribe was mulct, ten thousand camels the  
 due,  
 Blood-value paid perforce for a murder done of old.  
 'God gave them, let them go! But never since time began, 10  
 Muléykeh, peerless mare, owned master the match of you,  
 And you are my prize, my Pearl: I laugh at men's land and  
 gold!"

"So in the pride of his soul laughs Hóseyn—and right, I say.  
 Do the ten steeds run a race of glory? Outstripping all,  
 Ever Muléykeh stands first steed at the victor's staff. 15  
 Who started, the owner's hope, gets shamed and named, that  
 day.  
 'Silence,' or, last but one, is 'The Cuffed,' as we use to call  
 Whom the paddock's lord thrusts forth. Right, Hóseyn, I say,  
 to laugh!"

"Boasts he Muléykeh the Pearl?" the stranger replies: "Be sure  
 On him I waste nor scorn nor pity, but lavish both 20  
 On Duhl the son of Sheybán, who withers away in heart

---

\* For this old Arabian tale of a horse-lover, Browning has created the appropriate atmosphere by various devices such as the lively racing movement in the verse, and the coining of appropriate names. It was published in the *Second Series of Dramatic Idyls* (1880).

1. *Hóseyn*: the name means "one who is constantly occupied with a horse."

11 ff. *Muléykeh*: Arabic diminutive for "Queen," but Browning takes it to mean "Pearl."

17. *Silence, Cuffed*: names given to horses that fail in the race.

21. *Duhl*: the name means "dwarfish."



For envy of Hóseyn's luck. Such sickness admits no cure.  
A certain poet has sung, and sealed the same with an oath,  
'For the vulgar—flocks and herds! The Pearl is a prize apart.' "

Lo, Duhl the son of Sheybán comes riding to Hóseyn's tent, 25  
And he casts his saddle down, and enters and "Peace!" bids he.  
"You are poor, I know the cause: my plenty shall mend the  
wrong.

'T is said of your Pearl—the price of a hundred camels spent  
In her purchase were scarce ill paid: such prudence is far from  
me

Who proffer a thousand. Speak! Long parley may last too  
long." 30

Said Hóseyn "You feed young beasts a many, of famous breed,  
Slit-eared, unblemished, fat, true offspring of Múzenneem:  
There stumbles no weak-eyed she in the line as it climbs the hill.  
But I love Muléykeh's face: her forefront whitens indeed  
Like a yellowish wave's cream-crest. Your camels—go gaze on  
them! 35  
Her fetlock is foam-splashed too. Myself am the richer still."

A year goes by: lo, back to the tent again rides Duhl.  
"You are open-hearted, ay—moist-handed, a very prince.  
Why should I speak of sale? Be the mare your simple gift!  
My son is pined to death for her beauty: my wife prompts  
'Fool, 40  
Beg for his sake the Pearl! Be God the rewarder, since  
God pays debts seven for one: who squanders on Him shows  
thrift.' "

Said Hóseyn "God gives each man one life, like a lamp, then  
gives  
That lamp due measure of oil: lamp lighted—hold high, wave  
wide  
Its comfort for others to share! once quench it, what help is  
left? 45  
The oil of your lamp is your son: I shine while Muléykeh lives.  
Would I beg your son to cheer my dark if Muléykeh died?  
It is life against life: what good avails to the life-bereft?"

Another year, and—hist! What craft is it Duhl designs?  
 He alights not at the door of the tent as he did last time, 50  
 But, creeping behind, he gropes his stealthy way by the trench  
 Half-round till he finds the flap in the folding, for night com-  
 bines  
 With the robber—and such is he: Duhl, covetous up to crime,  
 Must wring from Hóseyn's grasp the Pearl, by whatever the  
 wrench.

"He was hunger-bitten, I heard: I tempted with half my  
 store, 55  
 And a gibe was all my thanks. Is he generous like Spring dew?  
 Account the fault to me who chaffered with such an one!  
 He has killed, to feast chance comers, the creature he rode: nay,  
 more—  
 For a couple of singing-girls his robe has he torn in two:  
 I will beg! Yet I nowise gained by the tale of my wife and  
 son. 60

"I swear by the Holy House, my head will I never wash  
 Till I filch his Pearl away. Fair dealing I tried, then guile,  
 And now I resort to force. He said we must live or die:  
 Let him die, then,—let me live! Be bold—but not too rash!  
 I have found me a peeping-place: breast, bury your breathing  
 while 65  
 I explore for myself! Now, breathe! He deceived me not, the  
 spy!

"As he said—there lies in peace Hóseyn—how happy! Beside  
 Stands tethered the Pearl: thrice winds her headstall about his  
 wrist:  
 'T is therefore he sleeps so sound—the moon through the roof  
 reveals.  
 And, loose on his left, stands too that other, known far and  
 wide, 70  
 Buhéyseh, her sister born: fleet is she yet ever missed  
 The winning tail's fire-flash a-stream past the thunderous heels.

"No less she stands saddled and bridled, this second, in case  
 some thief  
Should enter and seize and fly with the first, as I mean to do.

61. *Holy House: the family of Mohammed.*

What then? The Pearl is the Pearl: once mount her we both  
escape.” 75

Through the skirt-fold in glides Duhl,—so a serpent disturbs no  
leaf

In a bush as he parts the twigs entwining a nest: clean through,  
He is noiselessly at his work: as he planned, he performs the  
rape.

He has set the tent-door wide, has buckled the girth, has clipped  
The headstall away from the wrist he leaves thrice bound as  
before, 80

He springs on the Pearl, is launched on the desert like bolt  
from bow.

Up starts our plundered man: from his breast though the heart  
be ripped,

Yet his mind has the mastery: behold, in a minute more,  
He is out and off and away on Buhéyseh, whose worth we know!

And Hóseyn—his blood turns flame, he has learned long since  
to ride, 85

And Buhéyseh does her part,—they gain—they are gaining fast  
On the fugitive pair, and Duhl has Ed-Dárraj to cross and quit,  
And to reach the ridge El-Sabán,—no safety till that be spied!  
And Buhéyseh is, bound by bound, but a horse-length off at last,  
For the Pearl has missed the tap of the heel, the touch of the  
bit. 90

She shortens her stride, she chafes at her rider the strange and  
queer:

Buhéyseh is mad with hope—beat sister she shall and must  
Though Duhl, of the hand and heel so clumsy, she has to thank.  
She is near now, nose by tail—they are neck by croup—joy! fear!  
What folly makes Hóseyn shout “Dog Duhl, Damned son of  
the Dust, 95

Touch the right ear and press with your foot my Pearl’s left  
flank!”

---

96. Rollo Springfield’s *The Horse and his Rider* (1847) says, in giving a version of this story, “Every Bedouin trains the animals he rides to obey some sign of this kind, to which he has recourse only on urgent occasions, and which he makes a close secret, not to be divulged even to his son.” But Hóseyn would rather lose possession of Muléykeh than have her beaten in speed.

And Duhl was wise at the word, and Muléykeh as prompt perceived

Who was urging, redoubled pace, and to hear him was to obey,  
And a leap indeed gave she, and vanished for evermore.

And Hóseyn looked one long last look as who, all bereaved, 100  
Looks, fain to follow the dead so far as the living may:

Then he turned Buhéyseh's neck slow homeward, weeping sore.

And, lo, in the sunrise, still sat Hóseyn upon the ground  
Weeping: and neighbours came, the tribesmen of Bénu-Asád  
In the vale of green Er-Rass, and they questioned him of his  
grief; 105

And he told from first to last how, serpent-like, Duhl had  
wound

His way to the nest, and how Duhl rode like an ape, so bad!  
And how Buhéyseh did wonders, yet Pearl remained with the  
thief.

And they jeered him, one and all: "Poor Hóseyn is crazed past  
hope! 109

How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune's spite?

To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or girl,

And here were Muléykeh again, the eyed like an antelope,

The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by night!"—

"And the beaten in speed!" wept Hóseyn: "You never have  
loved my Pearl."

## PAN AND LUNA\*

Si credere dignum est.—*Georgic*, iii. 390

O WORTHY of belief I hold it was,  
Virgil, your legend in those strange three lines!  
No question, that adventure came to pass

104. *Bénu-Asád*: sons of the lion.

\* Published in *Dramatic Idyls, Second Series* (1880), this very un-Victorian poem tells a Classical myth with a sensuous realization that even Ovid and the Elizabethans hardly surpassed. Pan was the Greek god of Nature and of country people. He was half goat, rough, ruddy in complexion, fond of music, noise, and riot. Luna was the virgin moon-goddess Artemis (Cynthia or Diana). In "One Word More," the "Epilogue" to *Ferishtah's Fancies, etc.*, the moon is a symbol of Browning's wife. But it

One black night in Arcadia: yes, the pines,  
Mountains and valleys mingling made one mass 5  
Of black with void black heaven: the earth's confines,  
The sky's embrace,—below, above, around,  
All hardened into black without a bound.

Fill up a swart stone chalice to the brim  
With fresh-squeezed yet fast-thickening poppy-juice: 10  
See how the sluggish jelly, late a-swim,  
Turns marble to the touch of who would loose  
The solid smooth, grown jet from rim to rim,  
By turning round the bowl! So night can fuse  
Earth with her all-comprising sky. No less, 15  
Light, the least spark, shows air and emptiness.

And thus it proved when—diving into space,  
Stript of all vapour, from each web of mist  
Utterly film-free—entered on her race  
The naked Moon, full-orbed antagonist 20  
Of night and dark, night's dowry: peak to base,  
Upstart mountains, and each valley, kissed  
To sudden life, lay silver-bright: in air  
Flew she revealed, Maid-Moon with limbs all bare.

Still as she fled, each depth—where refuge seemed— 25  
Opening a lone pale chamber, left distinct  
Those limbs: mid still-retreating blue, she teemed  
Herself with whiteness,—virginal, uncinct  
By any halo save what finely gleamed  
To outline not disguise her: heaven was linked 30  
In one accord with earth to quaff the joy,  
Drain beauty to the dregs without alloy.

would be rash to identify Browning with Pan. The Latin quotation means, "If it is worthy of belief." The whole passage in Virgil's *Georgics* (III) which gave Browning the idea for this poem is: "Thus, if the tale is worthy of belief, Pan, Arcadia's god, beguiled you, O Moon, calling you to the depths of the woods, wooing you with a gift of snowy wool, and you did not disdain him." This constituted the first eclipse of the moon (*cf.* 89).

4. *Arcadia*: district in Greece which according to Virgil was the home of pastoral simplicity.

28. *Uncinct*: not girdled.

Whereof she grew aware. What help? When, lo,  
 A succourable cloud with sleep lay dense:  
 Some pine-tree-top had caught it sailing slow,  
 35 And tethered for a prize: in evidence  
 Captive lay fleece on fleece of piled-up snow  
 Drowsily patient: flake-heaped how or whence,  
 The structure of that succourable cloud,  
 What matter? Shamed she plunged into its shroud. 40

Orbed—so the woman-figure poets call  
 Because of rounds on rounds—that apple-shaped  
 Head which its hair binds close into a ball  
 Each side of curving ears—that pure undraped  
 Pout of the sister paps—that . . . Once for all,  
 45 Say—her consummate circle thus escaped  
 With its innumerable circlets, sank absorbed,  
 Safe in the cloud—O naked Moon full-orbed!

But what means this? The downy swathes combine,  
 Conglobe, the smothery coy-caressing stuff 50  
 Curdles about her! Vain each twist and twine  
 Those lithe limbs try, encroached on by a fluff  
 Fitting as close as fits the dented spine  
 Its flexile ivory outside-flesh: enough!  
 The plummy drifts contract, condense, constrict, 55  
 Till she is swallowed by the feathery springe.

As when a pearl slips lost in the thin foam  
 Churned on a sea-shore, and, o'er-frothed, conceits  
 Herself safe-housed in Amphitrite's dome,—  
 If, through the bladdery wave-worked yeast, she meets 60  
 What most she loathes and leaps from,—elf from gnome  
 No gladlier,—finds that safest of retreats  
 Bubble about a treacherous hand wide ope  
 To grasp her—(divers who pick pearls so grope)—

So lay this Maid-Moon clasped around and caught 65  
 By rough red Pan, the god of all that tract:

34. *Succourable*: admitting of relief.

54. *Flexile*: supple. 56. *Springe*: snare.

59. *Amphitrite's dome*: the sea, Amphitrite being wife of Poseidon (Neptune).

He it was schemed the snare thus subtly wrought  
 With simulated earth-breath,—wool-tufts packed  
 Into a billowy wrappage. Sheep far-sought  
 For spotless shearings yield such: take the fact 70  
 As learned Virgil gives it,—how the breed  
 Whitens itself for ever: yes, indeed!

If one forefather ram, though pure as chalk  
 From tinge on fleece, should still display a tongue  
 Black 'neath the beast's moist palate, prompt men baulk 75  
 The propagating plague: he gets no young:  
 They rather slay him,—sell his hide to caulk  
 Ships with, first steeped in pitch,—nor hands are wrung  
 In sorrow for his fate: protected thus,  
 The purity we love is gained for us. 80

So did Girl-moon, by just her attribute  
 Of unmatched modesty betrayed, lie trapped,  
 Bruised to the breast of Pan, half-god half-brute,  
 Raked by his bristly boar-sward while he lapped  
 —Never say, kissed her! that were to pollute 85  
 Love's language—which moreover proves unapt  
 To tell how she recoiled—as who finds thorns  
 Where she sought flowers—when, feeling, she touched—horns!

Then—does the legend say?—first moon-eclipse  
 Happened, first swooning-fit which puzzled sore 90  
 The early sages? Is that why she dips  
 Into the dark, a minute and no more,  
 Only so long as serves her while she rips  
 The cloud's womb through and, faultless as before,  
 Pursues her way? No lesson for a maid 95  
 Left she, a maid herself thus trapped, betrayed?

Ha, Virgil? Tell the rest, you! “To the deep  
 Of his domain the wildwood, Pan forthwith

71-80. In the *Georgics*, immediately before the passage on Pan and Luna, Virgil had been explaining how to get white wool: “But cast out the ram, however white his fleece, if he has even a black tongue under his moist palate.”

81-2. Browning has changed this from Virgil's account in which Luna appears a willing victim.

Called her, and so she followed"—in her sleep,  
 Surely?—"by no means spurning him." The myth 100  
 Explain who may! Let all else go, I keep  
 —As of a ruin just a monolith—  
 Thus much, one verse of five words, each a boon:  
 Arcadia, night, a cloud, Pan, and the moon.

"TOUCH HIM NE'ER SO LIGHTLY. . . ."\*

"Touch him ne'er so lightly, into song he broke:  
 Soil so quick-receptive,—not one feather-seed,  
 Not one flower-dust fell but straight its fall awoke  
 Vitalizing virtue: song would song succeed  
 Sudden as spontaneous—prove a poet-soul!" 5

Indeed?

Rock's the song-soil rather, surface hard and bare:  
 Sun and dew their mildness, storm and frost their rage  
 Vainly both expend,—few flowers awaken there:  
 Quiet in its cleft broods—what the after age  
 Knows and names a pine, a nation's heritage. 10

WANTING IS—WHAT?\*\*

WANTING is—what?  
 Summer redundant,  
 Blueness abundant,  
 —Where is the blot?

---

\* This attacks the popular notion (expressed in the first stanza) that the poet sings spontaneously and easily. Rather, he says, rock, and all the extremes of weather, are best for great poetry. I cannot see that DeVane is correct in saying that here Browning expresses a preference for conceiving of "the poet as 'prophet'" (*Browning Handbook*, p. 411, and *Shorter Poems*, p. 382). The *Second Series of Dramatic Idyls* (1880), to which this is attached as an epilogue, was much less "prophetic" or philosophical than most of Browning's other work of the seventies and eighties.

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\*\* This poem describes the emptiness of beauty without Love. It is typical of Browning that the "comer" might be a girl or Divine Love, "He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew, xxi, 9); "The Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come" (Revelation, i, 8). This was printed as the prologue to *Jocoseria* (1883). In the same volume is "Cristina and Monaldeschi," in which the love was not perfect; forgiveness is wanting. Perhaps other poems in *Jocoseria* could be interpreted from this point of view (e.g., "Adam, Lilith, and Eve").



Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same, 5  
 —Framework which waits for a picture to frame:  
 What of the leafage, what of the flower?  
 Roses embowering with nought they embower!  
 Come then, complete incompletion, O comer,  
 Pant through the blueness, perfect the summer! 10  
     Breathe but one breath  
     Rose-beauty above,  
     And all that was death  
     Grows life, grows love,  
     Grows love! 15

## CRISTINA AND MONALDESCHI\*

Ah, but how each loved each, Marquis!  
     Here 's the gallery they trod  
     Both together, he her god,  
     She his idol,—lend your rod,  
 Chamberlain!—ay, there they are—"Quis 5  
     Separabit?"—plain those two  
     Touching words come into view,  
     Apposite for me and you:

Since they witness to incessant  
     Love like ours: King Francis, he— 10

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\* Published in *Jocoseria* (1883). Queen Cristina of Sweden (1626-89), brilliant and unconventional, refused to bind herself in marriage, and abdicated her throne in 1654 to live a life of greater freedom, retaining, however, absolute and sovereign jurisdiction over all her servants. She went to Rome, joined the Catholic Church, and surrounded herself with Italian officers. The Marquis Monaldeschi, her "Master of Horse," she described in her memoirs as "a gentleman of most handsome person and fine manners, who from the first moment reigned exclusively over my heart." He is supposed to have taken advantage of his position, writing to a young Roman beauty letters ridiculing Christina's fondness for him. These letters came into her possession; and she summoned Monaldeschi to the Gallery of the Deer at Fontainebleau, confronted him with the letters, and had him murdered, November 10, 1657. (See C. N. Wenger, "Clio's Rights in Poetry," *P.M.L.A.*, LX [1945], 256-270.)

1. Marquis Gian Rinaldi Monaldeschi, her lover, has betrayed her confidences; she is ironically speaking of faithful lovers.

5-6. *Quis separabit?*: "Who will separate?"—a Latin motto inscribed on the frame of a picture in the gallery of Diana of Poitiers at the palace of Fontainebleau (near Paris).

Diane the adored one, she—  
 Prototypes of you and me.  
 Everywhere is carved her Crescent  
 With his Salamander-sign—  
 Flame-fed creature: flame benign 15  
 To itself or, if malign,

Only to the meddling curious,  
 —So, be warned, Sir! Where 's my head?  
 How it wanders! What I said  
 Merely meant—the creature, fed 20  
 Thus on flame, was scarce injurious  
 Save to fools who woke its ire,  
 Thinking fit to play with fire.  
 'Tis the Crescent you admire?

Then, be Diane! I 'll be Francis. 25  
 Crescents change,—true!—wax and wane,  
 Woman-like: male hearts retain  
 Heat nor, once warm, cool again.  
 So, we figure—such our chance is—  
 I as man and you as . . . What? 30  
 Take offence? My Love forgot  
 He plays woman, I do not?

I—the woman? See my habit,  
 Ask my people! Anyhow,  
 Be we what we may, one vow 35  
 Binds us, male or female. Now,—  
 Stand, Sir! Read! "*Quis separabit?*"  
 Half a mile of pictured way  
 Past these palace-walls to-day  
 Traversed, this I came to say. 40

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10. Francis I ruled France from 1515 to 1547. Browning, however, makes a mistake—it was not Francis I but Henry II who kept Diana of Poitiers at Fontainebleau as his favorite mistress.

13–14. The crescent moon was the emblem of Diana; the salamander, emblem of the King. Both signs are repeated in the decorations of the gallery, and Browning has carried through a dramatic contrast between frigidity and fire.

You must needs begin to love me;  
 First I hated, then, at best,  
 —Have it so!—I acquiesced;  
 Pure compassion did the rest.  
 From below thus raised above me, 45  
 Would you, step by step, descend,  
 Pity me, become my friend,  
 Like me, like less, loathe at end?

That 's the ladder's round you rose by!  
 That—my own foot kicked away, 50  
 Having raised you: let it stay,  
 Serve you for retreating? Nay.  
 Close to me you climbed: as close by,  
 Keep your station, though the peak  
 Reached proves somewhat bare and bleak 55  
 Woman 's strong if man is weak.

Keep here, loving me forever!  
 Love's look, gesture, speech, I claim;  
 Act love, lie love, all the same—  
 Play as earnest were our game! 60  
 Lonely I stood long: 't was clever  
 When you climbed, before men's eyes,  
 Spurned the earth and scaled the skies,  
 Gained my peak and grasped your prize.

Here you stood, then, to men's wonder; 65  
 Here you tire of standing? Kneel!  
 Cure what giddiness you feel,  
 This way! Do your senses reel?  
 Not unlikely! What rolls under?  
 Yawning death in yon abyss 70  
 Where the waters whirl and hiss  
 Round more frightful peaks than this.

Should my buffet dash you thither . . .  
 But be sage! No watery grave  
 Needs await you: seeming brave 75  
 Kneel on safe, dear timid slave!

You surmised, when you climbed hither,  
 Just as easy were retreat  
 Should you tire, conceive unmeet  
 Longer patience at my feet? 80

Me as standing, you as stooping,—  
 Who arranged for each the pose?  
 Lest men think us friends turned foes,  
 Keep the attitude you chose!  
 Men are used to this same grouping— 85  
 I and you like statues seen.  
 You and I, no third between,  
 Kneel and stand! That makes the scene.

Mar it—and one buffet . . . Pardon!  
 Needless warmth—wise words in waste! 90  
 'T was prostration that replaced  
 Kneeling, then? A proof of taste.  
 Crouch, not kneel, while I mount guard on  
 Prostrate love—become no waif,  
 No estray to waves that chafe 95  
 Disappointed—love 's so safe!

Waves that chafe? The idlest fancy!  
 Peaks that scare? I think we know  
 Walls enclose our sculpture: so  
 Grouped, we pose in Fontainebleau. 100  
 Up now! Wherefore hesitancy?  
 Arm in arm and cheek by cheek,  
 Laugh with me at waves and peak!  
 Silent still? Why, pictures speak.

See, where Juno strikes Ixion, 105  
 Primatice speaks plainly! Pooh—  
 Rather, Florentine Le Roux!  
 I 've lost head for who is who—

105. An ominous suggestion—Ixion attempted to seduce Juno, Queen of the Gods, and was cruelly punished.

106. Francesco Primaticcio (1504–70) designed some of the decorations in the Gallery of Francis I at Fontainebleau.

107. *Le Roux*: French way of saying Rossi (a Florentine painter).

So it swims and wanders! Fie on  
 What still proves me female! Here, 110  
 By the staircase!—for we near  
 That dark "Gallery of the Deer."

Look me in the eyes once! Steady!  
 Are you faithful now as erst  
 On that eve when we two first 115  
 Vowed at Avon, blessed and cursed  
 Faith and falsehood? Pale already?  
 Forward! Must my hand compel  
 Entrance—this way? Exit—well  
 Somehow, somewhere. Who can tell? 120

What if to the self-same place in  
 Rustic Avon, at the door  
 Of the village church once more,  
 Where a tombstone paves the floor  
 By that holy-water basin 125  
 You appealed to—"As, below,  
 This stone hides its corpse, e'en so  
 I your secrets hide"? What hol

Friends, my four! You, Priest, confess him!  
 I have judged the culprit there: 130  
 Execute my sentence! Care  
 For no mail such cowards wear!  
 Done, Priest? Then, absolve and bless him!  
 Now—you three, stab thick and fast,  
 Deep and deeper! Dead at last? 135  
 Thanks, friends—Father, thanks! Aghast?

112. *Gallery of the Deer: Galerie des Cerfs* at Fontainebleau, where the murder took place. Browning seems to have shifted the scene of the murder to the *Galerie de Diane* just above it, as he has made the murder take place in Christina's presence and without delay, to heighten the sensational effect.

129. *Priest*: Father le Bel, Prior of the Maturins, who begged her to spare him.

130. She had a legal right to judge him, since he was her Master of Horse and by a clause in her Act of Abdication she had retained absolute and sovereign jurisdiction over all her servants. The only objection the French Court made was to having the murder committed at Fontainebleau. She retired to Rome and gave herself up to art and chemistry and idleness.

132. In reality he was wearing mail, and they had to decapitate him.

What one word of his confession  
 Would you tell me, though I lured  
 With that royal crown abjured  
 Just because its bars immured 140  
 Love too much? Love burst compression,  
 Fled free, finally confessed  
 All its secrets to that breast  
 Whence . . . let Avon tell the rest!

## ADAM, LILITH, AND EVE\*

ONE day it thundered and lightened.  
 Two women, fairly frightened,  
 Sank to their knees, transformed, transfixed,  
 At the feet of the man who sat betwixt;  
 And "Mercy!" cried each—"if I tell the truth 5  
 Of a passage in my youth!"

Said This: "Do you mind the morning  
 I met your love with scorning?  
 As the worst of the venom left my lips,  
 I thought, 'If, despite this lie, he strips 10  
 The mask from my soul with a kiss—I crawl  
 His slave,—soul, body and all!'"

Said That: "We stood to be married;  
 The priest, or someone, tarried;

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144. *Avon*: village near Fontainebleau where Monaldeschi is buried.

\* Under the influence of fear, two types of women tell a typical man the truth about their past emotions towards him; but when fear has passed all three pretend it was a jest. "Adam" in Hebrew means "man," and it has been traditional to consider Adam and Eve as typical man and wife. Browning's interest in ancient rabbinical lore is illustrated by other poems also of the *Jocoseria* volume in which this was published (1883).

7. *This*: Lilith. The Hebrew commentators in the *Talmud* said that Adam had Lilith as a mate before Eve (distinguishing between the woman mentioned in Genesis, i, 27, and Genesis, ii, 18). She is said to have been disobedient and sensual. Browning indicates that one of these traits could have been played off against the other.

13. *That*: Eve, his wife, who is supposed to have saved him from Lilith, but here confesses that she would have deserted him at the altar if the one she really loved had appeared.

'If Paradise-door proved locked?' smiled you. 15  
 I thought, as I nodded, smiling too,  
 'Did one, that 's away, arrive—nor late  
 Nor soon should unlock Hell's gate!'"

It ceased to lighten and thunder.  
 Up started both in wonder, 20  
 Looked round and saw that the sky was clear,  
 Then laughed "Confess you believed us, Dear!"  
 "I saw through the joke!" the man replied  
 They re-seated themselves beside.

### NEVER THE TIME AND THE PLACE\*

NEVER the time and the place  
 And the loved one all together!  
 This path—how soft to pace!  
 This May—what magic weather!  
 Where is the loved one's face? 5  
 In a dream that loved one's face meets mine,  
 But the house is narrow, the place is bleak  
 Where, outside, rain and wind combine  
 With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,  
 With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek, 10  
 With a malice that marks each word, each sign!  
 O enemy sly and serpentine,  
 Uncoil thee from the waking man!  
 Do I hold the Past  
 Thus firm and fast 15  
 Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?  
 This path so soft to pace shall lead  
 Thro' the magic of May to herself indeed!  
 Or narrow if needs the house must be,  
 Outside are the storms and strangers: we— 20  
 Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she,  
 —I and she!

---

\* A lyric referring to his love for his wife who died in 1861. This was published in *Jocoseria* (1883).

12. *Enemy*: perhaps time? or change? or forgetfulness? or doubt?

EPILOGUE TO *FERISHTAH'S FANCIES*\*

OH, Love—no, Love! All the noise below, Love,  
 Groanings all and moanings—none of Life I lose!  
 All of Life 's a cry just of weariness and woe, Love—  
 "Hear at least, thou happy one!" How can I, Love, but  
 choose?

Only, when I do hear, sudden circle round me 5  
 —Much as when the moon's might frees a space from cloud—  
 Iridescent splendours: gloom—would else confound me—  
 Barrièred off and banished far—bright-edged the blackest  
 shroud!

Thronging through the cloud-rift, whose are they, the faces  
 Faint revealed yet sure divined, the famous ones of old? 10  
 "What"—they smile—"our names, our deeds so soon erases  
 Time upon his tablet where Life's glory lies enrolled?"

"Was it for mere fool's-play, make-believe and mumming,  
 So we battled it like men, not boylike sulked or whined?  
 Each of us heard clang God's 'Come!' and each was coming: 15  
 Soldiers all, to forward-face, not sneaks to lag behind!"

"How of the field's fortune? That concerned our Leader!  
 Led, we struck our stroke nor cared for doings left and right:  
 Each as on his sole head, failer or succeeder,  
 Lay the blame or lit the praise: no care for cowards: fight!" 20

Then the cloud-rift broadens, spanning earth that 's under  
 Wide our world displays its worth, man's strife and strife's  
 success:

All the good and beauty, wonder crowning wonder,  
 Till my heart and soul applaud perfection, nothing less.

---

\* Of all Browning's expressions of facile optimism, the volume *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884) was perhaps the most extreme. But at the very end he says that his blood turns to ice at the thought that his cheery philosophy may all be error, and all his hopes an illusion inspired by love.

6. Browning frequently uses the moon as the symbol for his wife, now dead 23 years. (Cf. "One Word More.") This poem is addressed to her.



Only, at heart's utmost joy and triumph, terror 25  
 Sudden turns the blood to ice: a chill wind disencharms  
 All the late enchantment! What if all be error—  
 If the halo irised round my head were, Love, thine arms?

### THE NAMES\*

SHAKESPEARE!—to such name's sounding, what succeeds  
 Fitly as silence? Falter forth the spell,—  
 Act follows word, the speaker knows full well,  
 Nor tampers with its magic more than needs.  
 Two names there are: That which the Hebrew reads 5  
 With his soul only: if from lips it fell,  
 Echo, back thundered by earth, heaven and hell,  
 Would own "Thou did'st create us!" Nought impedes  
 We voice the other name, man's most of might,  
 Awesomely, lovingly: let awe and love 10  
 Mutely await their working, leave to sight  
 All of the issue as—below—above—  
 Shakespeare's creation rises: one remove,  
 Though dread—this finite from that infinite.

\*This was published in 1884 on the first page of *The Shakespearean Show-Book* and in the *Browning Society's Papers* (I, 105\*), but was not collected by Browning in any volume of his works. (The only difference between these two earliest texts of the sonnet is that the former uses a semicolon after the title, the latter a period.) The poem was contributed at the request of Dr. Furnivall, Shakespearean scholar and founder of the Browning Society. The Shakespearean Show was held to aid the Hospital for Women in Fulham Road.

This sonnet illustrates what might be called the Hebraism, as Arnold's sonnet "Shakespeare" the Hellenism, in Victorian Shakespeare-worship. Compare the story Browning liked to tell of Charles Lamb, who, when someone asked, "And if Christ entered this room?" answered, "You see, if Shakespeare entered we should all rise; if *He* appeared we must kneel" (*Letters of Robert Browning*, ed. Hood, 171-2).

6. The ancient Hebrews considered themselves forbidden to pronounce the sacred name of Yahweh or Jehovah (the sacred four letters, JHWH).

## WHY I AM A LIBERAL\*

"WHY?" Because all I haply can and do,  
 All that I am now, all I hope to be,—  
 Whence comes it save from fortune setting free  
 Body and soul the purpose to pursue,  
 God traced for both? If fetters, not a few, 5  
 Of prejudice, convention, fall from me,  
 These shall I bid men—each in his degree  
 Also God-guided—bear, and gaily too?

But little do or can the best of us:  
 That little is achieved through Liberty. 10  
 Who, then, dares hold—emancipated thus—  
 His fellow shall continue bound? Not I,  
 Who live, love, labour freely, nor discuss  
 A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."

\* This was first printed in a book edited by Andrew Reid, *Why I am a Liberal, being Definitions and Personal Confessions of Faith by the Best Minds of the Liberal Party* (London, 1885), from which this text is taken, since Browning never published it in any collected edition. (It was reprinted in the *Browning Society's Papers*, 1889, II, 92\*.)

Browning is using the term "Liberal" in the early Victorian sense, *i.e.*, one who believes in an extreme degree of liberty. It meant especially *laissez-faire* economics, that "rugged individualism" of which Browning is the poetic representative. Even when Browning wrote the sonnet this "Liberalism" was considered conservative, and the Liberal party was on the verge of disruption. Meredith's novel, *Beauchamp's Career*, shows how it was splitting into conservatives, sympathetic with vested interests, and the more radical wing. Browning's political opinions are the corollary of his religion, since the strength of Liberalism in England has been the Non-Conformist middle class.

## APOLLO AND THE FATES\*

## A PROLOGUE

(Hymn, in *Mercurium*, v. 559. Eumenides, vv. 693-4, 697-8. Alcestis, vv. 12, 33.)

APOLLO

[From above.]

Flame at my footfall, Parnassus! Apollo,  
 Breaking a-blaze on thy topmost peak,  
 Burns thence, down to the depths—dread hollow—  
 Haunt of the Dire Ones. Haste! They wreak  
 Wrath on Admetus whose respite I seek.

5

\* In this Prologue to *Parleyings with Certain People* (1887) Browning has followed the lead of the Greeks in expressing his ideas mythologically; it may be read as a prologue to all of his studies of the good and evil in human fate, since it is a mature and conclusive statement of his philosophy and his theory of the function of poetry. This is an optimistic answer, by a belated Romantic, to the pessimistic fatalism characteristic of late Victorian authors like Hardy, whose universe might be ruled by these underworld Fates without Apollonian relief. (Hardy's *Return of the Native* had appeared 9 years before.) A comparison of this, one of Browning's latest poems, with *Pippa Passes*, his earliest great success, proves how little change had taken place in Browning's ideas in the 46 years between 1841 (when Wordsworth had not yet succeeded Southey as Poet Laureate) and 1887 (when George Bernard Shaw was already writing).

*Hymn, etc.*: The three passages Browning has in mind are as follows:  
 Homer's *Hymn to Mercury* (in Shelley's translation):

They [the Fates], having eaten the fresh honey, grow  
 Drunk with divine enthusiasm, and utter  
 With earnest willingness the truth they know.

Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (in Plumptre's translation, altering the second half of the second line):

This didst thou also in the house of Pheres,  
 Winning the Fates to free a man from death.  
 Thou hast o'erthrown, yea, thou, laws hoar with age,  
 And drugged with wine the ancient Goddesses.

Euripides' *Alcestis*: Apollo says, "The son of Pheres—him I saved from death, cheating the Fates;" and Orcus replies, "Did it not suffice to have snatched Admetus from his doom, beguiling the Fates with cunning?"

1. *Parnassus*: Mountain sacred to the Muses, to Apollo, and to Bacchus. In the underworld beneath the roots of this mountain dwelt the three Fates. Apollo was god of poetry and music, and god of the sun; two functions often associated so that he has been taken as a personification of the clear white light of Hellenic poetry and art, its balance, reason, and simple realism. "It may safely be asserted, that the Greeks would never have

THE FATES

[Below. *Darkness.*

Dragonwise couched in the womb of our Mother,

Coiled at thy nourishing heart's core, Night!

Dominant Dreads, we, one by the other,

Deal to each mortal his dole of light

On earth—the upper, the glad, the bright.

10

CLOTHO

Even so: thus from my loaded spindle

Plucking a pinch of the fleece, lo, "Birth"

Brays from my bronze lip: life I kindle:

Look, 't is a man! go, measure on earth

The minute thy portion, whatever its worth!

15

LACHESIS

Woe-purfl'd, weal-prankt,—if it speed, if it linger,—

Life's substance and show are determined by me,

Who, meting out, mixing with sure thumb and finger,

Lead life the due length: is all smoothness and glee,

All tangle and grief? Take the lot, my decree!

20

ATROPOS

—Which I make an end of: the smooth as the tangled

My shears cut asunder: each snap shrieks "One more

Mortal makes sport for us Moirai who dangled

become what they were, without the worship of Apollo; in him the brightest side of the Grecian mind is reflected" (Blakeney, *Smaller Classical Dictionary*). Apollo, as god of rational beauty, has sometimes (as in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*) been opposed to Dionysus or Bacchus, patron of the irrational and mysterious—wine, music, and tragedy. Browning probably has better justification in having Apollo make use of the invention of Bacchus.

4. *Dire Ones*: The Three Fates or *Parcae*, who preside over Destiny. (Compare the Weird Sisters of *Macbeth*, "Weird" being an old word for Fate.)

5. *Admetus*: King of Phærae. Browning tells this story in *Balaustion's Adventure, Including a Transcript from Euripides*. The play *Alcestis* "transcribed" from Euripides begins with a decree from the Fates that it is time for Admetus to die.

11 ff. *Clotho*: the Fate who spins the thread of life.

16 ff. *Lachesis*: the Fate who determines the length of life, which is embroidered (purfl'd) with woe and decked out with prosperity (*weal-prankt*).

21 ff. *Atropos*: the Fate who cuts the thread of life.

23. *Moirai*: the Fates

The puppet grotesquely till earth's solid floor  
Proved film he fell through, lost in Naught as before." 25

CLOTHO

I spin thee a thread. Live, Admetus! Produce him!

LACHESIS

Go,—brave, wise, good, happy! Now chequer the  
thread!

He is slaved for, yet loved by a god. I unloose him  
A goddess-sent plague. He has conquered, is wed,  
Men crown him, he stands at the height,—

ATROPOS

He is . . .

APOLLO

[*Entering: Light.*  
"Dead?" 30

Nay, swart spinsters! So I surprise you  
Making and marring the fortunes of Man?  
Huddling—no marvel, your enemy eyes you—  
Head by head bat-like, blots under the ban  
Of daylight earth's blessing since time began! 35

THE FATES

Back to thy blest earth, prying Apollo!  
Shaft upon shaft transpierce with thy beams  
Earth to the centre,—spare but this hollow  
Hewn out of night's heart, where our mystery seems  
Mewed from day's malice: wake earth from her dreams! 40

APOLLO

Crones, 't is your dusk selves I startle from slumber:  
Day's god deposes you—queens Night-crowned!  
—Plying your trade in a world ye encumber,  
Fashioning Man's web of life—spun, wound,  
Left the length ye allot till a clip strews the ground! 45

Behold I bid truce to your doleful amusement—  
Annulled by a subbeam!

31. *Spinster*: originally feminine form of *spinner*.

40. *Mewed*: concealed.

## THE FATES

Boy, are not we peers?

## APOLLO

You with the spindle grant birth: whose inducement  
 But yours—with the niggardly digits—endears  
 To mankind chance and change, good and evil? Your  
 shears . . . 50

## ATROPOS

Ay, mine and the conflict: so much is no fable.  
 We spin, draw to length, cut asunder: what then?  
 So it was, and so is, and so shall be: art able  
 To alter life's law for ephemeral men?

## APOLLO

Nor able nor willing. To threescore and ten 55  
 Extend but the years of Admetus! Disaster  
 O'ertook me, and, banished by Zeus, I became  
 A servant to one who forbore me though master:  
 True lovers were we. Discontinue your game,  
 Let him live whom I loved, then hate on, all the same! 60

## THE FATES

And what if we granted—law-flouter, use-trampler—  
 His life at the suit of an upstart? Judge, thou—  
 Of joy were it fuller, of span because ampler?  
 For love's sake, not hate's, end Admetus—ay, now—  
 Not a gray hair on head, nor a wrinkle on brow! 65

For, boy, 't is illusion: from thee comes a glimmer  
 Transforming to beauty life blank at the best.  
 Withdraw—and how looks life at worst, when to shimmer  
 Succeeds the sure shade, and Man's lot frowns—confessed  
 Mere blackness chance-brightened? Whereof shall attest 70

56-9. Apollo, having offended Zeus, was banished from Olympus, and became a servant to Admetus. They became close friends. Now that Apollo is restored to favor he wishes to save his friend's life.

66-7. In the view of the Fates, the Sun of Poetry does not simply light up reality, but transforms life by "gilding evil" and dullness. Browning lets Apollo grant this theory of poetry, since it is ground upon which the extreme realist and the romantic can meet in agreement.

The truth this same mortal, the darling thou stylest,  
 Whom love would advantage,—eke out, day by day,  
 A life which 't is solely thyself reconcilest  
 Thy friend to endure,—life with hope: take away  
 Hope's gleam from Admetus, he spurns it. For, say— 75

What 's infancy? Ignorance, idleness, mischief:  
 Youth ripens to arrogance, foolishness, greed:  
 Age—impotence, churlishness, rancour: call *this* chief  
 Of boons for thy loved one? Much rather bid speed  
 Our function, let live whom thou hatest indeed! 80

Persuade thee, bright boy-thing! Our eld be instructive!

APOLLO

And certes youth owns the experience of age.  
 Ye hold then, grave seniors, my beams are productive  
 —They solely—of good that's mere semblance, engage  
 Man's eye—gilding evil, Man's true heritage? 85

THE FATES

So, even so! From without,—at due distance  
 If viewed,—set a-sparkle, reflecting thy rays,—  
 Life mimics the sun: but withdraw such assistance,  
 The counterfeit goes, the reality stays—  
 An ice-ball disguised as a fire-orb.

APOLLO

What craze 90

Possesses the fool then whose fancy conceits him  
 As happy?

THE FATES

Man happy?

APOLLO

If otherwise—solve  
 This doubt which besets me! What friend ever greets him  
 Except with "Live long as the seasons revolve,"  
 Not "Death to thee straightway"? Your doctrines absolve 95

89. *Ice-ball* . . . *fire-orb*: Earthly life gets all its warmth from the Sun (the Arts).

Such hailing from hatred: yet Man should know best.

He talks it, and glibly, as life were a load  
 Man fain would be rid of: when put to the test,  
 He whines "Let it lie, leave me trudging the road  
 That is rugged so far, but methinks . . ."

## THE FATES

Ay, 't is owed 100

To that glamour of thine, he bethinks him "Once past

The stony, some patch, nay, a smoothness of sward  
 Awaits my tired foot: life turns easy at last"—

Thy largess so lures him, he looks for reward  
 Of the labour and sorrow.

## APOLLO

It seems, then—debarred 105

Of illusion—(I needs must acknowledge the plea)

Man desponds and despairs. Yet,—still further to draw  
 Due profit from counsel,—suppose there should be

Some power in himself, some compensative law  
 By virtue of which, independently . . .

## THE FATES

Faugh! 110

Strength hid in the weakling!

What bowl-shape hast there,  
 Thus laughingly proffered? A gift to our shrine?  
 Thanks—worsted in argument! Not so? Declare  
Its purpose!

105-7. Illusion is necessary to have happiness at all—notice how close Browning's optimism is to pessimism, supported by perhaps insubstantial props. Knock out the props, and one has the mood of many late-Victorian authors. Browning's feverish enthusiasm for life should not be confused with hearty gusto like that of the Renaissance, or Chaucer's cheerful humanity.



## APOLLO

I proffer earth's product, not mine.  
Taste, try, and approve Man's invention of—WINE! 115

## THE FATES

We feeding suck honeycombs.

## APOLLO

Sustenance meagre!  
Such fare breeds the fumes that show all things amiss.  
Quaff wine,—how the spirits rise nimble and eager,  
Unscale the dim eyes! To Man's cup grant one kiss  
Of your lip, then allow—no enchantment like this! 120

## CLOTHO

Unhook wings, unhood brows! Dost hearken?

## LACHESIS

I listen:  
I see—smell the food these fond mortals prefer  
To our feast, the bee's bounty!

## ATROPOS

The thing leaps! But—glisten  
Its best, I withstand it—unless all concur  
In adventure so novel.

## APOLLO

Ye drink?

## THE FATES

We demur. 125

## APOLLO

Sweet Trine, be indulgent nor scout the contrivance  
Of Man—Bacchus-prompted! The juice, I uphold,  
Illuminates gloom without sunny connivance,  
Turns fear into hope and makes cowardice bold,—  
Touching all that is leadlike in life turns it gold! 130

115. *Wine*: symbol of Imagination, the gods' last gift to Man. This, Apollo argues, is a human invention—Man has within himself a creative power that can fashion dynamic illusions independent of divine inspiration.

126. *Trine*: Trinity of Fates.

## THE FATES

Faith foolish as false!

## APOLLO

But essay it, soft sisters!  
Then mock as ye may. Lift the chalice to lip!  
Good: thou next—and thou! Seems the web, to you twisters  
Of life's yarn, so worthless?

## CLOTHO

Who guessed that one sip  
Would impart such a lightness of limb?

## LACHESIS

I could skip 135

In a trice from the pied to the plain in my woof!  
What parts each from either? A hair's breadth, no inch.  
Once learn the right method of stepping aloof,  
Though on black next foot falls, firm I fix it, nor flinch,  
—Such my trust white succeeds!

## ATROPOS

One could live—at a pinch! 140

## APOLLO

What, beldames? Earth's yield, by Man's skill, can effect  
Such a cure of sick sense that ye spy the relation  
Of evil to good? But drink deeper, correct  
Blear sight more convincingly still! Take your station  
Beside me, drain dregs! Now for edification! 145

Whose gift have ye gulped? Thank not me but my brother,  
Blithe Bacchus, our youngest of godships. 'T was he  
Found all boons to all men, by one god or other  
Already conceded, so judged there must be  
New guerdon to grace the new advent, you see! 150

Else how would a claim to Man's homage arise?  
The plan lay arranged of his mixed woe and weal,

So disposed—such Zeus' will—with design to make wise  
 The witless—that false things were mingled with real,  
 Good with bad: such the lot whereto law set the seal. 155

Now, human of instinct—since Semele's son,  
 Yet minded divinely—since fathered by Zeus,  
 With naught Bacchus tampered, undid not things done,  
 Owned wisdom anterior, would spare wont and use,  
 Yet change—without shock to old rule—introduce. 160

Regard how your cavern from crag-tip to base  
 Frowns sheer, height and depth adamantine, one death!  
 I rouse with a beam the whole rampart, displace  
 No splinter—yet see how my flambeau, beneath  
 And above, bids this gem wink, that crystal unsheathe! 165

Withdraw beam—disclosure once more Night forbids you  
 Of spangle and sparkle—Day's chance-gift, surmised  
 Rock's permanent birthright: my potency rids you  
 No longer of darkness, yet light—recognized—  
 Proves darkness a mask: day lives on though disguised. 170

If Bacchus by wine's aid avail so to fluster  
 Your sense, that life's fact grows from adverse and thwart  
 To helpful and kindly by means of a cluster—  
 Mere hand-squeeze, earth's nature sublimed by Man's art—  
 Shall Bacchus claim thanks wherein Zeus has no part? 175

Zeus—wisdom anterior? No, maids, be admonished!  
 If morn's touch at base worked such wonders, much more  
 Had noontide in absolute glory astonished  
 Your den, filled a-top to o'erflowing. I pour  
 No such mad confusion. 'T is Man's to explore 180

Up and down, inch by inch, with the taper his reason:  
 No torch, it suffices—held deftly and straight.

156. *Semele*: daughter of Cadmus, King of Thebes; mother of Bacchus.

160. For Browning, the poetic imagination, like alcohol, can make things look better "without shock to old rule," and lead men to "acquiescence in fate" (185). Contrast Shelley's view of the revolutionary function of poetry. Browning admired Shelley but did not emulate him.

Eyes, purblind at first, feel their way in due season,  
 Accept good with bad, till unseemly debate  
 Turns concord—despair, acquiescence in fate. 185

Who works this but Zeus? Are not instinct and impulse,  
 Not concept and incept his work through Man's soul  
 On Man's sense? Just as wine ere it reach brain must brim  
 pulse,  
 Zeus' flash stings the mind that speeds body to goal,  
 Bids pause at no part but press on, reach the whole. 190

For petty and poor is the part ye envisage  
 When—(quaff away, cummers!)—ye view, last and first,  
 As evil Man's earthly existence. Come! *Is* age,  
*Is* infancy—manhood—so uninterspersed  
 With good—some faint sprinkle?

CLOTHO

I 'd speak if I durst

APOLLO

Draughts dregward loose tongue-tie. 196

LACHESIS

I 'd see, did no web

Set eyes somehow winking.

APOLLO

Drains-deep lies their purge

—True collyrium!

ATROPOS

Words, surging at high-tide, soon ebb

From starved ears.

APOLLO

Drink but down to the source, they resurge.  
 Join hands! Yours and yours too! A dance or a dirge? 200

190. Cf. "A Grammarian's Funeral," 83-97; "Abt Vogler," 72;  
 "Andrea del Sarto," 97-8; etc.

192. *Cummers*: gossips.

198. *Collyrium*: eyewash.

## CHORUS

Quashed be our quarrel! Sourly and smilingly,  
 Bare and gowned, bleached limbs and browned,  
 Drive we a dance, three and one, reconcilingly,  
 Thanks to the cup where dissension is drowned,  
 Defeat proves triumphant and slavery crowned. 205

Infancy? What if the rose-streak of morning  
 Pale and depart in a passion of tears?  
 Once to have hoped is no matter for scorning!  
 Love once—e'en love's disappointment endears!  
 A minute's success pays the failure of years. 210

Manhood—the actual? Nay, praise the potential!  
 (Bound upon bound, foot it around!)  
 What *is*? No, what *may* be—sing! that 's Man's essential!  
 (Ramp, tramp, stamp and compound  
 Fancy with fact—the lost secret is found!) 215

Age? Why, fear ends there: the contest concluded,  
 Man *did* live his life, *did* escape from the fray:  
 Not scratchless but unscathed, he somehow eluded  
 Each blow fortune dealt him, and conquers to-day:  
 To morrow—new chance and fresh strength,—might we  
 say? 220

Laud then Man's life—no defeat but a triumph!  
*[Explosion from the earth's centre.]*

## CLOTHO

Ha, loose hands!

## LACHESIS

I reel in a swoond.

## ATROPOS

Horror yawns under me, while from on high—humph!  
 Lightnings astound, thunders resound,  
 Vault-roof reverberates, groans the ground! 225  
*[Silence]*

209. Cf. "Cristina" and "Bad Dreams I."

211. Cf. "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 40-41.

## APOLLO

I acknowledge.

## THE FATES

Hence, trickster! Straight sobered are we!

The portent assures 't was our tongue spoke the truth,  
Not thine. While the vapour encompassed us three

We conceived and bore knowledge—a bantling uncouth,  
Old brains shudder back from: so—take it, rash youth! 230

Lick the lump into shape till a cry comes!

## APOLLO

I hear.

## THE FATES

Dumb music, dead eloquence! Say it, or sing!

What was quickened in us and thee also?

## APOLLO

I fear.

## THE FATES

Half female, half male—go, ambiguous thing! 234  
While we speak—perchance sputter—pick up what we fling!

Known yet ignored, nor divined nor unguessed,

Such is Man's law of life. Do we strive to declare  
What is ill, what is good in our spinning? Worst, best,

Change hues of a sudden: now here and now there  
Flits the sign which decides: all about yet nowhere. 240

'T is willed so,—that Man's life be lived, first to last,

Up and down, through and through,—not in portions, for-  
sooth,

---

227-8. It seems that the original attitude of the Fates was nearer to the *actualities*; they should not have glorified this life, which is only preparatory. Nothing can "alter life's law for ephemeral man" (54), not even Art—nor does Art wish to do so (55). But the Fates have gained knowledge of the *potentialities* of Man. Browning's optimism is one of hope for the future; his vision of human life as it is, psychologically, and as it has been, historically, resembles the bleak estimate expressed earlier by the Fates. Nor was the poet "willing" (*cf.* 55) to try to eliminate this evil.

To pick and to choose from. Our shuttles fly fast,  
 Weave living, not life sole and whole: as age—youth,  
 So death completes living, shows life in its truth. 245

Man learningly lives: till death helps him—no lore!  
 It is doom and must be. Dost submit?

APOLLO

I assent—

Concede but Admetus! So much if no more  
 Of my prayer grant as peace-pledge! Be gracious though,  
 blent,  
 Good and ill, love and hate streak your life-gift! 250

THE FATES

Content!

Such boon we accord in due measure. Life's term  
 We lengthen should any be moved for love's sake  
 To forego life's fulfilment, renounce in the germ  
 Fruit mature—bliss or woe—either infinite. Take  
 Or leave thy friend's lot: on his head be the stake! 255

APOLLO

On mine, griesly gammers! Admetus, I know thee!  
 Thou prizest the right these unwittingly give  
 Thy subjects to rush, pay obedience they owe thee!  
 Importunate one with another they strive  
 For the glory to die that their king may survive. 260

Friends rush: and who first in all Pheræ appears  
 But thy father to serve as thy substitute?

CLOTHO

Bah!

APOLLO

Ye wince? Then his mother, well-stricken in years,  
 Advances her claim—or his wife—

256. *Gammers*: old women.

261. *Pheræ*: town in Thessaly where Pheræ, father of Admetus, reigned.

262-3. As a matter of fact, not all the predictions of Apollo are fulfilled in the story. His hopes are illusions; men are not so noble. But in

LACHESIS

Tra-la-la!

APOLLO

But he spurns the exchange, rather dies!

ATROPOS

Ha, ha, ha! 265  
 [*Apollo ascends. Darkness.*]

PROLOGUE TO *ASOLANDO*\*

"THE Poet's age is sad: for why?  
 In youth, the natural world could show  
 No common object but his eye  
 At once involved with alien glow—  
 His own soul's iris-bow. 5

"And now a flower is just a flower:  
 Man, bird, beast are but beast, bird, man—  
 Simply themselves, uncinct by dower  
 Of dyes which, when life's day began,  
 Round each in glory ran." 10

Friend, did you need an optic glass,  
 Which were your choice? A lens to drape  
 In ruby, emerald, chrysopras,  
 Each object—or reveal its shape  
 Clear outlined, past escape, 15

Browning's view, such illusions lead Man on, and the result is Progress. In his "A Death in the Desert" the man is praised who "Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth," above the man who could see nothing before him (in "the ineffectual clay") except what was already actually there.

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\* This "Prologue" to *Asolando* (1889) has special reference to the subtitle of the volume, *Fancies and Facts*, expressing the realist's preference for "facts." It is a counterpart of Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, admitting with the Romantic "That there hath past away a glory from the earth," but resolutely refusing to feel any romantic regret.

5. Iris was goddess of the rainbow.

13. *Chrysopras*: a kind of quartz.



The naked very thing?—so clear  
 That, when you had the chance to gaze,  
 You found its inmost self appear  
 Through outer seeming—truth ablaze,  
 Not falsehood's fancy-haze? 20

How many a year, my Asolo,  
 Since—one step just from sea to land—  
 I found you, loved yet feared you so—  
 For natural objects seemed to stand  
 Palpably fire-clothed! No— 25

No mastery of mine o'er these!  
 Terror with beauty, like the Bush  
 Burning but unconsumed. Bend knees,  
 Drop eyes to earthward! Language? Tush!  
 Silence 't is awe decrees. 30

And now? The lambent flame is—where?  
 Lost from the naked world: earth, sky,  
 Hill, vale, tree, flower,—Italia's rare  
 O'er-running beauty crowds the eye—  
 But flame? The Bush is bare. 35

Hill, vale, tree, flower—they stand distinct,  
 Nature to know and name. What then?  
 A Voice spoke thence with straight unlinked  
 Fancy from fact: see, all 's in ken:  
 Has once my eyelid winked? 40

21. *Asolo*: Small town in the Treviso, Italy, that Browning had visited as a young man on his first trip to Italy, when he was charmed with the place. His first work of great inspiration and poetic success, *Pippa Passes*, has Asolo for its setting. He visited the town again at the end of his life, and had been there a few weeks before his death in December, 1889. He records his disappointment not only in this poem but elsewhere: "I used to dream about [Asolo] so often in the old days, till at last I saw it again, and the dreams stopped" (Whiting, *The Brownings*, pp. 282-3). The title *Asolando* plays upon the name of the town. Browning got the verb *asolare* from Cardinal Bembo, who had lived near Asolo, and he uses it, he says, "for love of the place." It means, he explains in his dedication, "to disport in the open air, amuse oneself at random."

27-28. See Exodus, iii, 2.

No, for the purged ear apprehends  
 Earth's import, not the eye late dazed:  
 The Voice said "Call my works thy friends!  
 At Nature dost thou shrink amazed?  
 God is it who transcends."

45

## DUBIETY\*

I WILL be happy if but for once:  
 Only help me, Autumn weather,  
 Me and my cares to screen, ensconce  
 In luxury's sofa-lap of leather!

Sleep? Nay, comfort—with just a cloud  
 Suffusing day too clear and bright:  
 Eve's essence, the single drop allowed  
 To sully, like milk, Noon's water-white.

5

Let gauziness shade, not shroud,—adjust,  
 Dim and not deaden,—somehow sheathe  
 Aught sharp in the rough world's busy thrust,  
 If it reach me through dreaming's vapour-wreath.

10

Be life so, all things ever the same!  
 For, what has disarmed the world? Outside,  
 Quiet and peace: inside, nor blame  
 Nor want, nor wish whate'er betide.

15

What is it like that has happened before?  
 A dream? No dream, more real by much.  
 A vision? But fanciful days of yore  
 Brought many: mere musing seems not such.

20

Perhaps but a memory, after all!  
 —Of what came once when a woman leant  
 To feel for my brow where her kiss might fall.  
 Truth ever, truth only the excellent!

36-45. In the spirit of realistic science, Browning here attacks the romanticism that was dazzled into thinking it found God in Nature. He admits that he has been guilty of that error.

\*In the autumn of his life he recalls the real facts of his love affair, more excellent than any fancy. This was published in *Asolando* (1889).

## NOW\*

Out of your whole life give but a moment!  
 All of your life that has gone before,  
 All to come after it,—so you ignore  
 So you make perfect the present,—condense,  
 In a rapture of rage, for perfection's endowment, 5  
 Thought and feeling and soul and sense—  
 Merged in a moment which gives me at last  
 You around me for once, you beneath me, above me—  
 Me—sure that despite of time future, time past,—  
 This tick of our life-time 's one moment you love me! 10  
 How long such suspension may linger? Ah, Sweet—  
 The moment eternal—just that and no more—  
 When ecstasy's utmost we clutch at the core  
 While cheeks burn, arms open, eyes shut and lips meet!

## HUMILITY\*\*

WHAT girl but, having gathered flowers,  
 Stript the beds and spoilt the bowers,  
 From the lapful light she carries  
 Drops a careless bud?—nor tarries  
 To regain the waif and stray: 5  
 "Store enough for home"—she 'll say.

So say I too: give your lover  
 Heaps of loving—under, over,  
 Whelm him—make the one the wealthy!  
 Am I all so poor who—stealthy 10  
 Work it was!—picked up what fell:  
 Not the worst bud—who can tell?

---

\* He asks her to give him the present "moment eternal" for the ecstasy of love, at the cost of past and future. This poem of passionate abandon was published at the end of Browning's life, in *Asolando* (1889).

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\*\* Published in *Asolando* (1889), this love lyric is called by DeVane "perhaps, an old man's poem." It expresses appreciation for any bud of love that may be dropped carelessly by the girl in giving her lover "heaps of loving."

## POETICS\*

"So say the foolish!" Say the foolish so, Love?

"Flower she is, my rose"—or else "My very swan is she"—  
Or perhaps "Yon maid-moon, blessing earth below, Love,  
That art thou!"—to them, belike: no such vain words from  
me.

"Hush, rose, blush! no balm like breath," I chide it: 5

"Bend thy neck its best, swan,—hers the whiter curve!"  
Be the moon the moon: my Love I place beside it:  
What is she? Her human self,—no lower word will serve.

## SUMMUM BONUM\*\*

ALL the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:  
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one  
gem:

In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:  
Breath and bloom, shade and shine,—wonder, wealth, and—  
how far above them—

Truth, that 's brighter than gem, 5  
Trust, that 's purer than pearl,—

Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe—all were for me  
In the kiss of one girl.

## A PEARL, A GIRL\*\*\*

A SIMPLE ring with a single stone  
To the vulgar eye no stone of price:  
Whisper the right word, that alone—  
Forth starts a sprite, like fire from ice,

---

\* This appeared in *Asolando*, whose subtitle is *Fancies and Facts* (1889). It is the "poetics" of a *realistic* love poet. The beauties of his mistress should not be compared to the rose or the swan—she can be compared only to herself.

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\*\* The *summum bonum* is the ultimate good, the end sought by all systems of ethics. For the Stoics the supreme good was duty; for the Epicureans, pleasure. For the Christian the *summum bonum* is the love of God.

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\*\*\* Published in *Asolando* (1889).

1. *Ring*: like the ring of Solomon mentioned in "Abt Vogler."

And lo, you are lord (says an Eastern scroll)      5  
 Of heaven and earth, lord whole and sole  
 Through the power in a pearl.

A woman ('t is I this time that say)  
 With little the world counts worthy praise  
 Utter the true word—out and away      10  
 Escapes her soul: I am wrapt in blaze,  
 Creation's lord, of heaven and earth  
 Lord whole and sole—by a minute's birth—  
 Through the love in a girl!

### SPECULATIVE\*

OTHERS may need new life in Heaven—  
 Man, Nature, Art—made new, assume!  
 Man with new mind old sense to leaven,  
 Nature—new light to clear old gloom,  
 Art that breaks bounds, gets soaring-room.      5

I shall pray: "Fugitive as precious—  
 Minutes which passed,—return, remain!  
 Let earth's old life once more enmesh us,  
 You with old pleasure, me—old pain,  
 So we but meet nor part again!"      10

### BAD DREAMS. I\*\*

LAST night I saw you in my sleep:  
 And how your charm of face was changed!  
 I asked "Some love, some faith you keep?"  
 You answered "Faith gone, love estranged."

\* An expression of what Browning looks forward to at the end of his life. This appeared in *Asolando*, which was published on the day of his death, December 12, 1889. He will pray not for new life in Heaven, but that the past return and remain. Notice that Browning's prayer is the opposite of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." Similarly in *Ferishtah's Fancies* (in the lyric at end of "Two Camels") he says of Heaven, "Let it but resemble Earth myself have known! No bliss that's finer, fuller" (than the bliss of a blushing cheek and "a lip's mere tremble" which "effect a heartquake").

\*\* This is the first of four poems named "Bad Dreams" published in *Asolando: Fancies and Facts* (1889). Here the woman tells that she

Whereat I woke—a twofold bliss:  
 Waking was one, but next there came  
 This other: "Though I felt, for this,  
 My heart break, I loved on the same."

5

## BAD DREAMS. II\*

You in the flesh and here—  
 Your very self! Now, wait!  
 One word! May I hope or fear?  
 Must I speak in love or hate?  
 Stay while I ruminate!

5

The fact and each circumstance  
 Dare you disown? Not you!  
 That vast dome, that huge dance,  
 And the gloom which overgrew  
 A—possibly festive crew!

10

For why should men dance at all—  
 Why women—a crowd of both—  
 Unless they are gay? Strange ball—  
 Hands and feet plighting troth,  
 Yet partners enforced and loth!

15

Of who danced there, no shape  
 Did I recognize: thwart, perverse,

dreamed he said he had no faith in her, and that love was estranged. But she had the bliss of knowing that she "loved on the same." This is characteristic of Browning's interest in Love as a benefit to the one who loves.

\* The man speaks first of a dream betraying his unconscious doubt of her faithfulness. (See "Bad Dreams. I.") In this poem of the subconscious, Browning anticipates the psychology of psychoanalysis so popular with authors like Eugene O'Neill and Jean Cocteau in the 1920's and 1930's. Notice the comment on this poem in Berdoo's *Browning Cyclopaedia*: "The soul in sleep, free from the disguises of the day, wanders at will. Perhaps it may indeed be that our suppressed evil thoughts—thoughts that, kept down by custom, conventionality, and respect for public opinion, never become incarnate in act—walk at night and revel in unfettered freedom. . . ." Not only in conceptions, but in the very atmosphere of disgust and horror, this poem would seem to belong to our own twentieth-century poetry of disillusionment and despair.

Each grasped each, past escape  
In a whirl or weary or worse:  
Man's sneer met woman's curse, 20

While he and she toiled as if  
Their guardian set galley-slaves  
To supple chained limbs grown stiff:  
Unmanacled trulls and knaves—  
The lash for who misbehaves! 25

And a gloom was, all the while,  
Deeper and deeper yet  
O'ergrowing the rank and file  
Of that army of haters—set  
To mimic love's fever-fret. 30

By the wall-side close I crept,  
Avoiding the livid maze,  
And, safely so far, outstepped  
On a chamber—a chapel, says  
My memory or betrays— 35

Closet-like, kept aloof  
From unseemly witnessing  
What sport made floor and roof  
Of the Devil's palace ring  
While his Damned amused their king. 40

Ay, for a low lamp burned,  
And a silence lay about  
What I, in the midst, discerned  
Though dimly till, past doubt,  
'T was a sort of throne stood out— 45

High seat with steps, at least:  
And the topmost step was filled  
By—whom? What vested priest?  
A stranger to me,—his guild,  
His cult, unreconciled 50

To my knowledge how guild and cult  
 Are clothed in this world of ours:  
 I pondered, but no result  
 Came to—unless that Giaours  
 So worship the Lower Powers.

55

When suddenly who entered?  
 Who knelt—did you guess I saw?  
 Who—raising that face where centred  
 Allegiance to love and law  
 So lately—off-casting awe,

60

Down-treading reserve, away  
 Thrusting respect . . . but mine  
 Stands firm—firm still shall stay!  
 Ask Satan! for I decline  
 To tell—what I saw, in fine!

65

Yet here in the flesh you come—  
 Your same self, form and face,—  
 In the eyes, mirth still at home!  
 On the lips, that commonplace  
 Perfection of honest grace!

70

Yet your errand is—needs must be—  
 To palliate—well, explain,  
 Expurgate in some degree  
 Your soul of its ugly stain.  
 Oh, you—the good in grain—

75

How was it your white took tinge?  
 “A mere dream”—never object!  
 Sleep leaves a door on hinge  
 Whence soul, ere our flesh suspect,  
 Is off and away: detect

80

Her vagaries when loose, who can!  
 Be she pranksome, be she prude,  
 Disguise with the day began:  
 With the night—ah, what ensued  
 From draughts of a drink hell-brewed?

85



Then She: "What a queer wild dream!  
 And perhaps the best fun is—  
 Myself had its fellow—I seem  
 Scarce awake from yet. 'T was this—  
 Shall I tell you? First, a kiss! 90

"For the fault was just your own,—  
 'T is myself expect apology:  
 You warned me to let alone  
 (Since our studies were mere philology)  
 That ticklish (you said) Anthology. 95

"So I dreamed that I passed *exam*  
 Till a question posed me sore:  
 'Who translated this epigram  
 By—an author we best ignore?'  
 And I answered, 'Hannah More!'" 100

### BAD DREAMS. III\*

THIS was my dream: I saw a Forest  
 Old as the earth, no track nor trace  
 Of unmade man. Thou, Soul, explorest—  
 Though in a trembling rapture—space

95. *Anthology*: the Greek Anthology, ancient collection of poems and epigrams.

100. Hannah More (1745-1833) was a writer of pious and moralizing fictions, very priggish and prudish, representing, with their conscious innocence, the opposite kind of imaginative life from the unrestrained self-revelation of the man's dream. Hence I do not agree with DeVane's comment that this is a "meaningless dream" (*Browning Handbook*, p. 480). The priggish sentimentality of Hannah More and the surrealism of Jean Cocteau, a century and a half later, may be said to mark the two extremes in the literature of uncritical emotionalism which rose in the latter eighteenth century and has plunged to the depths in our own day. Browning stands at the middle point in this same romantic stream.

\* No poem by Browning is harder to interpret; yet, unlike "Childe Roland," it demands interpretation. It was published in *Asolando* (1889); if it had been written 40 years later, the "Dream" might be the result of reading Spengler's *Decline of the West* with its argument that all civilizations come ultimately to a dead level of degradation: metropolitan sophistication swallowing up all natural feeling, and primitive force destroying the culture of every "lucid City," until the cities are abandoned and the simple

Immeasurable! Shrubs, turned trees, 5  
 Trees that touch heaven, support its frieze  
 Studded with sun and moon and star:  
 While—oh, the enormous growths that bar  
 Mine eye from penetrating past  
 Their tangled twine where lurks—nay, lives 10  
 Royally lone, some brute-type cast  
 I' the rough, time cancels, man forgives.

On, Soul! I saw a lucid City  
 Of architectural device  
 Every way perfect. Pause for pity, 15  
 Lightning! nor leave a cicatrice  
 On those bright marbles, dome and spire,  
 Structures palatial,—streets which mire  
 Dares not defile, paved all too fine  
 For human footstep's smirch, not thine— 20  
 Proud solitary traverser,  
 My Soul, of silent lengths of way—  
 With what ecstatic dread, aver,  
 Lest life start sanctioned by thy stay!

Ah, but the last sight was the hideous! 25  
 A City, yes,—a Forest, true,—  
 But each devouring each. Perfidious  
 Snake-plants had strangled what I knew  
 Was a pavilion once: each oak  
 Held on his horns some spoil he broke 30  
 By surreptitiously beneath  
 Upthrusting: pavements, as with teeth,  
 Griped huge weed widening crack and split  
 In squares and circles stone-work erst.  
 Oh, Nature—good! Oh, Art—no whit 35  
 Less worthy! Both in one—accurst!

energy of the countryfolk spoiled. In the love tragedy of the "Bad Dreams" the man who speaks seems to fear that the woman has allowed intellect and "Art" to corrupt the naturalness of love, and that her animal instincts have destroyed the spiritually beautiful city that he once saw. The "Bad Dreams" I and II have already indicated that he had lost faith in her.

35-6. This may be Browning's commentary on the Naturalistic movement in the art of literature—perfidious snake-plants strangling ideals that were a pavilion once.

## WHICH?\*

So, the three Court-ladies began  
 Their trial of who judged best  
 In esteeming the love of a man:  
 Who preferred with most reason was thereby confessed  
 Boy-Cupid's exemplary catcher and cager; 5  
 An Abbé crossed legs to decide on the wager.

First the Duchesse: "Mine for me—  
 Who were it but God's for Him,  
 And the King's for—who but he?  
 Both faithful and loyal, one grace more shall brim 10  
 His cup with perfection: a lady's true lover,  
 He holds—save his God and his king—none above her."

"I require"—outspoke the Marquise—  
 "Pure thoughts, ay, but also fine deeds:  
 Play the paladin must he, to please 15  
 My whim, and—to prove my knight's service exceeds  
 Your saint's and your loyalist's praying and kneeling—  
 Show wounds, each wide mouth to my mercy appealing."

Then the Comtesse: "My choice be a wretch,  
 Mere losel in body and soul, 20  
 Thrice accurst! What care I, so he stretch  
 Arms to me his sole saviour, love's ultimate goal,

---

\* Published in *Asolando* (1889). This is a contest, such as might have taken place in Castiglione's Urbino or any salon of the Old Régime. Three currents of thought important in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries lie behind these decisions. The Duchesse prefers the man who holds none above his lady except his God and his king. (Thus she maintains the three chivalric loyalties of courtly love, the Church, and knightly service.) The Marquise requires pure thoughts and fine deeds—the Platonic ideal especially admired by the Renaissance. The Comtesse (Countess) wins the contest by preferring the wretch whose soul is worthless, but who looks upon her as his sole saviour. The poem is thus on the side of Calvinism against the more aristocratic ideals.

12. *Above her*: compare the Cavalier sentiment of the seventeenth-century poet Lovelace:

I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
 Loved I not honour more.

20. *Losel*: a worthless person.

Out of earth and men's noise—names of 'infidel,' 'traitor,'  
Cast up at him? Crown me, crown's adjudicator!"

And the Abbé uncrossed his legs, 25  
Took snuff, a reflective pinch,  
Broke silence: "The question begs  
Much pondering ere I pronounce. Shall I flinch?  
The love which to one and one only has reference  
Seems terribly like what perhaps gains God's preference." 30

"IMPERANTE AUGUSTO NATUS EST—"\*

WHAT it was struck the terror into me?  
This, Publius: closer! while we wait our turn  
I'll tell you. Water's warm (they ring inside)  
At the eighth hour, till when no use to bathe.

Here in the vestibule where now we sit, 5  
One scarce stood yesterday, the throng was such  
Of loyal gapers, folk all eye and ear  
While Lucius Varius Rufus in their midst

29. This Puritanic conception, of a love that has reference to one only, should be contrasted with the Platonic conception of love as rising to higher and higher objects through love of inferior objects.

30. Browning's Calvinistic background is evident in this opinion that God does not love any man for his good deeds or moral character, but showers love upon men who are totally depraved. It is doubtful whether a Catholic "Abbé" would express such a doctrine. The love enjoined by Christ is not to have reference to God only.

\* Setting: Rome, 2 B.C. The title refers to Christ and is Latin for "he was born [when] Augustus [was] reigning." Browning—historical psychologist—is interested in showing the state of the Roman mind at the time of the birth of Christ. He makes us appreciate what it means to say that the Classical world was ready to accept a Messiah. And he very skillfully allows the speaker to betray that *pride* of the pagan aristocrat which Christianity, a religion of love and humility, was to regard as the first of sins. The poem was published in *Asolando* (1889), at a time when many English writers were attempting a revival of paganism.

3-4. Two Romans are entering the public bath, important center of social life in Ancient Rome. They converse in the vestibule while the water is being heated.

8. Lucius Varius Rufus, Roman poet of the first century before Christ, wrote a panegyric in praise of the Emperor Augustus which has not survived. This is an anachronism, since Rufus died in 14 B.C.

Read out that long-planned late-completed piece,  
 His Panegyric on the Emperor. 10  
 "Nobody like him" little Flaccus laughed  
 "At leading forth an Epos with due pomp!  
 Only, when godlike Cæsar swells the theme,  
 How should mere mortals hope to praise aright?  
 Tell me, thou offshoot of Etruscan kings!" 15  
 Whereat Mæcenas smiling sighed assent.

I paid my quadrans, left the Thermæ's roar  
 Of rapture as the poet asked "What place  
 Among the godships Jove, for Cæsar's sake,  
 Would bid its actual occupant vacate 20  
 In favour of the new divinity?"  
 And got the expected answer "Yield thine own!"—  
 Jove thus dethroned, I somehow wanted air,  
 And found myself a-pacing street and street,  
 Letting the sunset, rosy over Rome, 25  
 Clear my head dizzy with the hubbub—say  
 As if thought's dance therein had kicked up dust  
 By trampling on all else: the world lay prone,  
 As—poet-propped, in brave hexameters—  
 Their subject triumphed up from man to God. 30  
 Caius Octavius Cæsar the August—  
 Where was escape from his prepotency?  
 I judge I may have passed—how many piles  
 Of structure dropt like doles from his free hand

10. Caius Octavius Augustus (63 B.C.—14 A.D.) was the first Roman emperor.

11. The Latin poet Horatius Flaccus is usually called Horace. He actually died in 8 B.C., a few years before the time of this poem.

12. *Epos*: epic.

15-16. Romans were proud to trace their ancestry back to the kings of the Etruscans, a people powerful in Italy before Rome. Notice how Horace, while disclaiming ability to praise, is flattering Mæcenas, his wealthy patron.

17. *Quadrans*: Roman coin worth half a cent, the price of the bath. *Thermæ*: the baths.

21. Some of the Roman poets gave divine honors to the Emperor. *Augustus* means "consecrated in the augury." The god Cronus had dethroned his father Saturn, and had been dethroned by Jove. Jove would be dethroned in time—not, however, by an emperor but by Christ.

34-74. From Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, "Augustus," ch. 28-30 and 34.

To Rome on every side? Why, right and left, 35  
 For temples you 've the Thundering Jupiter,  
 Avenging Mars, Apollo Palatine:  
 How count Piazza, Forum—there 's a third  
 All but completed. You 've the Theatre  
 Named of Marcellus—all his work, such work!— 40  
 One thought still ending, dominating all—  
 With warrant Varius sang "Be Cæsar God!"  
 By what a hold arrests he Fortune's wheel,  
 Obtaining and retaining heaven and earth  
 Through Fortune, if you like, but favour—no! 45  
 For the great deeds flashed by me, fast and thick  
 As stars which storm the sky on autumn nights—  
 Those conquests! but peace crowned them,—so, of peace!  
 Count up his titles only—these, in few—  
 Ten years Triumvir, Consul thirteen times, 50  
 Emperor, nay—the glory topping all—  
 Hailed Father of his Country, last and best  
 Of titles, by himself accepted so:  
 And why not? See but feats achieved in Rome—  
 Not to say, Italy—he planted there 55  
 Some thirty colonies—but Rome itself  
 All new-built, "marble now, brick once," he boasts:  
 This Portico, that Circus. Would you sail?  
 He has drained Tiber for you: would you walk?  
 He straightened out the long Flaminian Way. 60  
 Poor? Profit by his score of donatives!  
 Rich—that is, mirthful? Half-a-hundred games  
 Challenge your choice! There 's Rome—for you and me  
 Only? The centre of the world besides!  
 For, look the wide world over, where ends Rome? 65  
 To sunrise? There 's Euphrates—all between!  
 To sunset? Ocean and immensity:  
 North,—stare till Danube stops you: South, see Nile,  
 The Desert and the earth-upholding Mount.  
 Well may the poet-people each with each 70  
 Vie in his praise, our company of swans,

57. Suetonius says that Augustus "could justly boast that he had found it built of brick and left it in marble" (ch. 28). In Suetonius, Browning also found the list of buildings erected by Augustus.

69. *Earth-upholding Mount*: Atlas, in northwestern Africa.

Virgil and Horace, singers—in their way—  
 Nearly as good as Varius, though less famed:  
 Well may they cry, "No mortal, plainly God!"

Thus to myself myself said, while I walked: 75  
 Or would have said, could thought attain to speech,  
 Clean baffled by enormity of bliss  
 The while I strove to scale its heights and sound  
 Its depths—this masterdom o'er all the world  
 Of one who was but born,—like you, like me, 80  
 Like all the world he owns,—of flesh and blood.  
 But he—how grasp, how gauge his own conceit  
 Of bliss to me near inconceivable?  
 Or—since such flight too much makes reel the brain—  
 Let 's sink—and so take refuge, as it were, 85  
 From life's excessive altitude—to life's  
 Breathable wayside shelter at its base!  
 If looms thus large this Cæsar to myself  
 —Of senatorial rank and somebody—  
 How must he strike the vulgar nameless crowd, 90  
 Innumerable swarm that 's nobody at all?  
 Why,—for an instance,—much as yon gold shape  
 Crowned, sceptred, on the temple opposite—  
 Fulgurant Jupiter—must daze the sense  
 Of—say, yon outcast begging from its step! 95  
 What, anti-Cæsar, monarch in the mud,  
 As he is pinnacled above thy pate?  
 Ay, beg away! thy lot contrasts full well  
 With his whose bounty yields thee this support—  
 Our Holy and Inviolable One, 100  
 Cæsar, whose bounty built the fane above!  
 Dost read my thought? Thy garb, alack, displays  
 Sore usage truly in each rent and stain—  
 Faugh! Wash though in Suburra! 'Ware the dogs  
 Who may not so disdain a meal on thee! 105  
 What, stretchest forth a palm to catch my alms?  
 Aha, why yes: I must appear—who knows?—  
 I, in my toga, to thy rags and thee—

94. *Fulgurant*: lightning-flashing.

104. *Suburra*: a street of bad repute in Rome.

Quæstor—nay, Ædile, Censor—Pol! perhaps  
The very City-Prætor's noble self! 110  
As to me Cæsar, so to thee am I?  
Good: nor in vain shall prove thy quest, poor rogue!  
Hither—hold palm out—take this quarter-as!

And who did take it? As he raised his head,  
(My gesture was a trifle—well, abrupt), 115  
Back fell the broad flap of the peasant's-hat,  
The homespun cloak that muffled half his cheek  
Dropped somewhat, and I had a glimpse—just one!  
One was enough. Whose—whose might be the face?  
That unkempt careless hair—brown, yellowish— 120  
Those sparkling eyes beneath their eyebrows' ridge  
(Each meets each, and the hawk-nose rules between)  
—That was enough, no glimpse was needed more!  
And terrifyingly into my mind  
Came that quick-hushed report was whispered us, 125  
"They do say, once a year in sordid garb  
He plays the mendicant, sits all day long,  
Asking and taking alms of who may pass,  
And so averting, if submission help,  
Fate's envy, the dread chance and change of things 130  
When Fortune—for a word, a look, a nought—  
Turns spiteful and—the petted lioness—  
Strikes with her sudden paw, and prone falls each  
Who patted late her neck superiorly,  
Or trifled with those claw-tips velvet-sheathed." 135  
"He 's God!" shouts Lucius Varius Rufus: "Man  
And worms'-meat any moment!" mutters low  
Some Power, admonishing the mortal-born.

Ay, do you mind? There 's meaning in the fact  
That whoso conquers, triumphs, enters Rome, 140

109. *Pol!*—He swears by Pollux, twin of Castor.

113. *Quarter-as*: a penny.

114. *He*: the Emperor Augustus. Lines 114-138 are based on Suetonius' "Augustus," ch. 79 and 91.

127. "It was likewise because of a dream that every year on an appointed day he begged alms of the people, holding out his open hand to have pennies dropped into it." (Suetonius, ch. 91.)



Climbing the Capitolian, soaring thus  
 To glory's summit,—Publius, do you mark—  
 Ever the same attendant who, behind,  
 Above the Conqueror's head supports the crown  
 All-too-demonstrative for human wear, 145  
 —One hand's employment—all the while reserves  
 Its fellow, backward flung, to point how, close  
 Appended from the car, beneath the foot  
 Of the up-borne exulting Conqueror,  
 Frown—half-descried—the instruments of shame, 150  
 The malefactor's due. Crown, now—Cross, when?

Who stands secure? Are even Gods so safe?  
 Jupiter that just now is dominant—  
 Are not there ancient dismal tales how once  
 A predecessor reigned ere Saturn came, 155  
 And who can say if Jupiter be last?  
 Was it for nothing the grey Sibyl wrote  
 "Cæsar Augustus regnant, shall be born  
 In blind Judæa"—one to master him,  
 Him and the universe? An old-wife's tale? 160  
 Bath-drudge! Here, slave! No cheating! Our turn next.  
 No loitering, or be sure you taste the lash!  
 Two strigils, two oil-drippers, each a sponge!

### DEVELOPMENT\*

My Father was a scholar and knew Greek.  
 When I was five years old, I asked him once  
 "What do you read about?"  
 "The siege of Troy."  
 "What is a siege and what is Troy?"

141. *Capitolian*: the Capitoline Hill, with its Temple of Jupiter.

157-9. *Grey Sibyl*: probably the Erethraean Sibyl. In the *Sibylline Oracles* (Bk. III, 55-60; VIII, etc.) is a prophecy of the coming of a Messiah.

163. *Strigil*: a flesh brush.

\* Published in Browning's last volume, *Asolando* (1889), this is at once his chief statement on educational method, and a comment, by implication, on Biblical scholarship.

3. Homer's *Iliad*, telling of the siege of Troy, became one of Robert Browning's favorite books.

## Whereat

He piled up chairs and tables for a town, 5  
 Set me a-top for Priam, called our cat  
 —Helen, enticed away from home (he said)  
 By wicked Paris, who couched somewhere close  
 Under the footstool, being cowardly,  
 But whom—since she was worth the pains, poor puss— 10  
 Towzer and Tray,—our dogs, the Atreidai,—sought  
 By taking Troy to get possession of  
 —Always when great Achilles ceased to sulk,  
 (My pony in the stable)—forth would prance  
 And put to flight Hector—our page-boy's self. 15  
 This taught me who was who and what was what:  
 So far I rightly understood the case  
 At five years old: a huge delight it proved  
 And still proves—thanks to that instructor sage  
 My Father, who knew better than turn straight 20  
 Learning's full flare on weak-eyed ignorance,  
 Or, worse yet, leave weak eyes to grow sand-blind,  
 Content with darkness and vacuity.

It happened, two or three years afterward,  
 That—I and playmates playing at Troy's Siege— 25  
 My Father came upon our make-believe.  
 "How would you like to read yourself the tale  
 Properly told, of which I gave you first  
 Merely such notion as a boy could bear?  
 Pope, now, would give you the precise account 30  
 Of what, some day, by dint of scholarship,  
 You 'll hear—who knows?—from Homer's very mouth.  
 Learn Greek by all means, read the 'Blind Old Man,  
 Sweetest of Singers'—*tuphlos* which means 'blind,'  
*Hedistos* which means 'sweetest.' Time enough! 35  
 Try, anyhow, to master him some day;

11. *Atreidai*: the sons of Atreus, Menelaus and Agamemnon.

23. While Browning is attacking the misguided educator who fails to soften the light of learning to the "weak eyes" of the pupil, he considers the educator even worse who would be content to leave the child in ignorance of great literature.

30. Alexander Pope's translation of the *Iliad* into heroic couplets (1720) was very popular for several generations.

Until when, take what serves for substitute,  
Read Pope, by all means!"

So I ran through Pope,  
Enjoyed the tale—what history so true?  
Also attacked my Primer, duly drudged, 40  
Grew fitter thus for what was promised next—  
The very thing itself, the actual words,  
When I could turn—say, Buttmann to account.

Time passed, I ripened somewhat: one fine day,  
"Quite ready for the Iliad, nothing less? 45  
There 's Heine, where the big books block the shelf:  
Don't skip a word, thumb well the Lexicon!"

I thumbed well and skipped nowise till I learned  
Who was who, what was what, from Homer's tongue,  
And there an end of learning. Had you asked 50  
The all-accomplished scholar, twelve years old,  
"Who was it wrote the Iliad?"—what a laugh!  
"Why, Homer, all the world knows: of his life  
Doubtless some facts exist: it 's everywhere:  
We have not settled, though, his place of birth: 55  
He begged, for certain, and was blind beside:  
Seven cities claimed him—Scio, with best right,  
Thinks Byron. What he wrote? Those Hymns we have.

39. Aristotle says in his *Poetics* (IX, 1451 a, b) "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen. . . . Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular." If the young Browning had taken this attitude towards the tale, his enjoyment could not have been injured by historical research, which would have been merely irrelevant. But it is characteristic of Browning to treat poetry as closer to history than almost any other poet. Hence to find that Homer wrote fiction would distress him, as it would not distress an Aristotelian.

43. Philipp Carl Buttmann (1764-1829) was a German scholar, famous for his Greek grammar.

46. *Heine*: Christian Gottlieb Heyne (1729-1812) whose edition of the *Iliad* was considered a standard text.

57. Seven cities claimed to be Homer's birthplace. The list is sometimes given as: Athens, Rhodes, Argos, Salamis, Smyrna, Colophon, and Chios (Scio).

58. These hymns are no longer ascribed to Homer.

Then there 's the 'Battle of the Frogs and Mice,'  
That 's all—unless they dig 'Margites' up 60  
(I 'd like that) nothing more remains to know."

Thus did youth spend a comfortable time;  
Until—"What 's this the Germans say is fact  
That Wolf found out first? It 's unpleasant work  
Their chop and change, unsettling one's belief: 65  
All the same, while we live, we learn, that 's sure."  
So, I bent brow o'er *Prolegomena*.  
And, after Wolf, a dozen of his like  
Proved there was never any Troy at all,  
Neither Besiegers nor Besieged,—nay, worse,— 70  
No actual Homer, no authentic text,  
No warrant for the fiction I, as fact,  
Had treasured in my heart and soul so long,—  
Ay, mark you! and as fact held still, still hold,  
Spite of new knowledge, in my heart of hearts 75  
And soul of souls, fact's essence freed and fixed  
From accidental fancy's guardian sheath.  
Assuredly thenceforward—thank my stars!—  
However it got there, deprive who could—  
Wring from the shrine my precious tenantry, 80  
Helen, Ulysses, Hector and his Spouse,  
Achilles and his Friend?—though Wolf—ah, Wolf!  
Why must he needs come doubting, spoil a dream?

59-60. The *Batrachomyomachia* ("Battle of the Frogs and Mice"), a mock epic, and the "Margites," a humorous poem, were attributed to Homer.

64. Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) in his *Prolegomena in Homerum* contended that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were not the work of one author but of several whose poems were handed down by oral tradition. After a century of controversy, the "unity of Homer" has been successfully defended by recent scholars.

65. Browning's objection to this "higher criticism" of Homer is similar to his objection to Biblical scholarship. (See "Christmas Eve," etc.) This poem hints at an application of its argument to the Higher Criticism of the Bible.

69-73. Excavations later led to the discovery of the actual walls of Homeric Troy, and many scholars now think that the leading names of the *Iliad* represent real men.

81. *Spouse*: Andromache.

But then "No dream 's worth waking"—Browning says:  
 And here 's the reason why I tell thus much. 85  
 I, now mature man, you anticipate,  
 May blame my Father justifiably  
 For letting me dream out my nonage thus,  
 And only by such slow and sure degrees  
 Permitting me to sift the grain from chaff, 90  
 Get truth and falsehood known and named as such.  
 Why did he ever let me dream at all,  
 Not bid me taste the story in its strength?  
 Suppose my childhood was scarce qualified  
 To rightly understand mythology, 95  
 Silence at least was in his power to keep:  
 I might have—somehow—correspondingly—  
 Well, who knows by what method, gained my gains,  
 Been taught, by forthrights not meanderings,  
 My aim should be to loathe, like Peleus' son, 100  
 A lie as Hell's Gate, love my wedded wife,  
 Like Hector, and so on with all the rest.  
 Could not I have excogitated this  
 Without believing such men really were?  
 That is—he might have put into my hand 105  
 The "Ethics"? In translation, if you please,  
 Exact, no pretty lying that improves,  
 To suit the modern taste: no more, no less—  
 The "Ethics": 't is a treatise I find hard  
 To read aright now that my hair is grey, 110  
 And I can manage the original.  
 At five years old—how ill had fared its leaves!  
 Now, growing double o'er the Stagirite,  
 At least I soil no page with bread and milk,  
 Nor crumple, dogsear and deface—boys' way. 115

100. *Peleus' son*: Achilles, hero of the *Iliad*.

106. The *Nichomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, the greatest Classical presentation of the principles of morality. Browning here turns from attacking pedantic historical treatment of the classics, and objects also to the scholastic teachers who would have the pupil learn an abstract science of morality instead of feeding the imagination on great literature.

113. *Stagirite*: Aristotle, so called because of his birthplace, Stagira.

## REVERIE\*

I know there shall dawn a day  
 —Is it here on homely earth?  
 Is it yonder, worlds away,  
 Where the strange and new have birth,  
 That Power comes full in play? 5

Is it here, with grass about,  
 Under befriending trees,  
 When shy buds venture out,  
 And the air by mild degrees  
 Puts winter's death past doubt? 10

Is it up amid whirl and roar  
 Of the elemental flame  
 Which star-flecks heaven's dark floor,  
 That, new yet still the same,  
 Full in play comes Power once more? 15

Somewhere, below, above,  
 Shall a day dawn—this I know—  
 When Power, which vainly strove  
 My weakness to o'erthrow,  
 Shall triumph. I breathe, I move, 20

I truly am, at last!  
 For a veil is rent between  
 Me and the truth which passed  
 Fitful, half-guessed, half-seen,  
 Grasped at—not gained, held fast. 25

\* DeVane considers this poem "one of the happiest expressions of Browning's metaphysics." (*Browning Handbook*, 499). It appeared in *Asolando* (1889) at the very end of the poet's life. Yet its themes—the inferiority of perfection, the evidence for Power and for Love in the universe, their ultimate harmony—had been treated by Browning in poems all through his career. Cf. "Epistle of Karshish," "A Death in the Desert," etc.

18-21. Cf. the sonnet "Batter my Heart" by John Donne (a poet much admired by Browning) especially line 3, "That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me" and 12-13,

Take me to you, imprison me, for I  
 Except you enthrall me, never shall be free.

I for my race and me  
Shall apprehend life's law:  
In the legend of man shall see  
Writ large what small I saw  
In my life's tale: both agree. 30

As the record from youth to age  
Of my own, the single soul—  
So the world's wide book: one page  
Deciphered explains the whole  
Of our common heritage. 35

How but from near to far  
Should knowledge proceed, increase?  
Try the clod ere test the star!  
Bring our inside strife to peace  
Ere we wage, on the outside, war! 40

So, my annals thus begin:  
With body, to life awoke  
Soul, the immortal twin  
Of body which bore soul's yoke  
Since mortal and not akin. 45

By means of the flesh, grown fit,  
Mind, in surview of things,  
Now soared, anon alit  
To treasure its gatherings  
From the ranged expanse—to-wit, 50

Nature,—earth's heaven's wide show  
Which taught all hope, all fear:  
Acquainted with joy and woe,  
I could say, "Thus much is clear,  
Doubt annulled thus much: I know. 55

"All is effect of cause:  
As it would, has willed and done

45-6. Since the body is mortal it is not akin to the immortal soul, but the body (flesh) aids the soul to grow fit.

Power: and my mind's applause  
 Goes, passing laws each one,  
 To Omnipotence, lord of laws." 60

Head praises, but heart refrains  
 From loving's acknowledgment.  
 Whole losses outweigh half-gains:  
 Earth's good is with evil blent:  
 Good struggles but evil reigns. 65

Yet since Earth's good proved good—  
 Incontrovertibly  
 Worth loving—I understood  
 How evil—did mind descry  
 Power's object to end pursued— 70

Were haply as cloud across  
 Good's orb, no orb itself:  
 Mere mind—were it found at loss  
 Did it play the tricky elf  
 And from life's gold purge the dross? 75

Power is known infinite:  
 Good struggles to be—at best  
 Seems—scanned by the human sight,  
 Tried by the senses' test—  
 Good palpably: but with right 80

Therefore to mind's award  
 Of loving, as power claims praise?  
 Power—which finds naught too hard,  
 Fulfilling itself all ways  
 Unchecked, unchanged: while barred, 85

Baffled, what good began  
 Ends evil on every side.  
 To Power submissive man  
 Breathes "E'en as Thou art, abide!"  
 While to good "Late-found, long-sought, 90

58-61. The Power in Nature's Laws discovered and applauded by  
 "mere mind" is not praised by the heart.



Would Power to a plenitude  
 But liberate, but enlarge  
 Good's strait confine,—renewed  
 Were ever the heart's discharge  
 Of loving!" Else doubts intrude. 95

For you dominate, stars all!  
 For a sense informs you—brute,  
 Bird, worm, fly, great and small,  
 Each with your attribute  
 Or low or majestic! 100

Thou earth that embosomest  
 Offspring of land and sea—  
 How thy hills first sank to rest,  
 How thy vales bred herb and tree  
 Which dizen thy mother-breast— 105

Do I ask? "Be ignorant  
 Ever!" the answer clangs:  
 Whereas if I plead world's want,  
 Soul's sorrows and body's pangs,  
 Play the human applicant,— 110

Is a remedy far to seek?  
 I question and find response:  
 I—all men, strong or weak,  
 Conceive and declare at once  
 For each want its cure. "Power, speak! 115

"Stop change, avert decay  
 Fix life fast, banish death,  
 Eclipse from the star bid stay,  
 Abridge of no moment's breath  
 One creature! Hence, Night, hail, Day!" 120

What need to confess again  
 No problem this to solve

By 'impotence? Power, once plain  
 Proved Power,—let on Power devolve  
 Good's right to co-equal reign! 125

Past mind's conception—Power!  
 Do I seek how star, earth, beast,  
 Bird, worm, fly, gain their dower  
 For life's use, most and least?  
 Back from the search I cower. 130

Do I seek what heals all harm,  
 Nay, hinders the harm at first,  
 Saves earth? Speak, Power, the charm!  
 Keep the life there unamerced  
 By chance, change, death's alarm! 135

As promptly as mind conceives,  
 Let Power in its turn declare  
 Some law which wrong retrieves,  
 Abolishes everywhere  
 What thwarts, what irks, what grieves! 140

Never to be! and yet  
 How easy it seems—to sense  
 Like man's—if somehow met  
 Power with its match—immense  
 Love, limitless, unbeset 145

By hindrance on every side!  
 Conjectured, nowise known,  
 Such may be: could man confide  
 Such would match—were Love but shown  
 Stript of the veils that hide— 150

Power's self now manifest!  
 So reads my record: thine,  
 O world, how runs it? Guessed  
 Were the purport of that prime line,  
 Prophetic of all the rest! 155

"In a beginning God  
 Made heaven and earth." Forth flashed  
 Knowledge: from star to clod  
 Man knew things: doubt abashed  
 Closed its long period. 160

Knowledge obtained Power praise.  
 Had Good been manifest,  
 Broke out in cloudless blaze,  
 Unchequered as unrepressed,  
 In all things Good at best— 165

Then praise—all praise, no blame—  
 Had hailed the perfection. No!  
 As Power's display, the same  
 Be Good's—praise forth shall flow  
 Unisonous in acclaim! 170

Even as the world its life,  
 So have I lived my own—  
 Power seen with Love at strife,  
 That sure, this dimly shown,  
 —Good rare and evil rife. 175

Whereof the effect be—faith  
 That, some far day, were found  
 Ripeness in things now rathe,  
 Wrong righted, each chain unbound,  
 Renewal born out of scathe. 180

Why faith—but to lift the load,  
 To leaven the lump, where lies  
 Mind prostrate through knowledge owed  
 To the loveless Power it tries  
 To withstand, how vain! In flowed 185

Ever resistless fact:  
 No more than the passive clay

178. *Rathe*: early in the season.

180. *Scathe*: injury.

Disputes the potter's act,  
 Could the whelmed mind disobey  
 Knowledge the cataract. 190

But, perfect in every part,  
 Has the potter's moulded shape,  
 Leap of man's quickened heart,  
 Throe of his thought's escape,  
 Stings of his soul which dart 195

Through the barrier of flesh, till keen  
 She climbs from the calm and clear,  
 Through turbidity all between,  
 From the known to the unknown here,  
 Heaven's "Shall be," from Earth's "Has been"? 200

Then life is—to wake not sleep,  
 Rise and not rest, but press  
 From earth's level where blindly creep  
 Things perfected, more or less,  
 To the heaven's height, far and steep, 205

Where, amid what strifes and storms  
 May wait the adventurous quest,  
 Power is Love—transports, transforms  
 Who aspired from worst to best,  
 Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms'. 210

I have faith such end shall be:  
 From the first, Power was—I knew.  
 Life has made clear to me  
 That, strive but for closer view,  
 Love were as plain to see. 215

When see? When there dawns a day,  
 If not on the homely earth,  
 Then yonder, worlds away,  
 Where the strange and new have birth,  
 And Power comes full in play. 220

189. *Whelmed*: overwhelmed.

190. *Cataract*: overwhelming downpour.



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